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SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE.

VOL. I.

SYBIL'S SECOND LOVE.

BY

JULIA KAVANAGH,

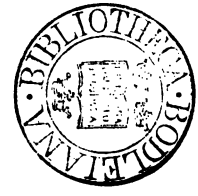
AUTHOR OF

"NATHALIE," "ADELE," "QUEEN MAB,"

&c. &c.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. I.



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CHAPTER I.

"THIS is a very dreary old house, Denise," said Sybil, with a sigh, "and I am sick of it."

Denise was kneeling by the hearth tending the fire. She looked up, and seemed to ponder over the words just uttered by her young mistress.

The kitchen to which Sybil Kennedy had come down to make this declaration was anything but a dreary place in the estimation of Denise. It was a low, large, and quiet room. Oak-beams, dark with age, crossed the ceiling. The tall oaken press and dresser shone again, so polished with wax were their carved doors. Three windows, with octagon panes of a greenish glass, and one of which had a screen of vine-leaves, let in a subdued light that stole along the red tiles of the floor, and vanished in the dark yawning abyss of the fire-place. This was vast, gloomy, and deep. It was of rough stone, on which lilies and shells were

rudely carved. Tall andirons, a deep valance, black with smoke, and on the mantel-shelf a row of shining candlesticks, and saints' images, in black frames, were its only ornaments. In all Saint Vincent there was not such another kitchen chimney as this, and both kitchen and chimney were the delight of Denise's heart.

"In seventeen hundred and ninety-three," she said, with great deliberation, "my great-grandfather, who was a mason, was called in by Monsieur de Renneville, and told to plaster up this chimney, on account of the Royal lilies that were carved upon it, and that was how they saved it."

Sybil yawned, and looked with profound indifference at the chimney. She knew it was admired, and so was that old abbey, with its cross and its cloister, and its grounds, that overlooked the sullen, roaring channel; but to be transferred from a lively boarding-school in Brompton to an old nunnery, converted into a dwelling-house, on the French coast, is not the fate most acceptable to seventeen. Besides, Mr. Kennedy had forgotten to leave her the key of the library, and he had been gone since the morning, and it was five o'clock in the afternoon, and her aunt, Miss Glyn,

who had been coming this week, had not arrived. No wonder that Sybil was "sick of it."

Denise, a buxom French maiden, of some twenty-five years of age, seemed puzzled by the weariness of spirit which oppressed her young mistress.

"The last abbess," she said, slowly, "liked Saint Vincent. She did not think it a dreary old house."

"To be sure not. Had she not ten nuns with her?" saucily replied Sybil. "Ah! if I had ten young nuns with me," she added, with much seriousness, "I should like Saint Vincent amazingly."

But it is time that we should describe Sybil Kennedy. She was a slight, dark-eyed and dark-haired girl, very fair, and, though not beautiful, very pretty. Indeed, she was as fresh and bright as any wild field-flower on a summer morning. She had such a gay young face, though she was sick of Saint Vincent, that it was a joy to look at her. Good-humour and goodness were both written on her clear open forehead. Her rosy lips seemed made for saucy speech and sunny smiles. Archness, mirth, and ready wit were written in her whole aspect. There was but one contrast to the pleasant

story of this fair book—this young girl's dark eyes were large, deep, and impassioned. They were wonderful eyes for one so gay and young, and bore a meaning which might as yet be unknown to their owner. For they told of fitful and vehement emotions, of brief and ardent joys, and maybe, too, of long sorrows, since to feel keenly is surely to suffer much. Nothing more tragic than *ennui*, however, ailed her now, and it was with an impatient little yawn that she said,

"I used to think that one was sure to have adventures in these old houses; ghosts, or legends, or something or other, but I now see they are just as stupid as brick ones; and, indeed——"

The sound of the opening door interrupted Sybil. She looked round and saw her father's gardener, Narcisse.

Truth compels us to declare, that the heathen youth, to whom his own beauty proved so fatal, was no prototype of Mr. Kennedy's servant. Indeed, this modern Narcissus could shave his beard and brush his hair opposite the oval glass in his attic without incurring the least peril thereby. He was a little dark man of fifty, with a long lean face, and very broad shoulders—in short, no

beauty. Holding the door in his hand, Narcisse looked into the kitchen, and nodded at his young mistress.

"Now, Narcisse, I will not be bored with questions," said Sybil; "I know nothing—I can say nothing—there!"

"I told him so," placidly said Narcisse, rubbing one of his legs against the other, perhaps to scratch.

Now, reader, if you think that the personal pronoun "him" refers to any particular individual, you are mistaken. It is part of the Narcisse phraseology, which has its peculiarities.

"Who is it?" impatiently asked Sybil.

"An oyster."

This simile—for, of course, Narcisse is speaking figuratively—is another portion of the Narcisse phraseology. It implies hatred, scorn, or merely contempt.

"Tell him papa is not within."

"I told him so, but he will not go—a regular oyster."

Oysters not being celebrated for their powers of locomotion, Narcisse probably thought the simile applicable to this obstinate stranger. Sybil

began to feel a little flurried. What was the stranger like?—Middle-aged, tall, and a fine man, was Narcisse's reply. Still Sybil looked perplexed. This oyster might be of the finest kind and flavour, but what was she to do with it?

"He is in the garden waiting," said Narcisse.

"Show him in," said Sybil.

"And he has got his carpet-bag."

The carpet-bag made Sybil change her mind. It was plain the visitor came to take possession, and she prudently thought that, as her father would soon come home, the stranger might as well stay in the garden, and wait there. In the meanwhile, Sybil also thought that she might go upstairs, and reconnoitre the enemy through one of the first-floor windows. She accordingly left the kitchen by a door opposite to that by which Narcisse was still standing. Saint Vincent had been an abbey, and a low gloomy passage took Sybil from the kitchen to the cloister. It was small, Gothic, and very beautiful. The bright sunshine threw on the walls which enclosed it the sharp shadows of the arched gallery. In the centre of the quadrangle rose a carved stone cross of fine proportions, but grass grew between the

disjointed flagstones of this quiet court, and on its walls Sybil could still read the half-effaced inscriptions that had once greeted the eyes of her pious predecessors. "Blessed are they who weep, for they shall be comforted," said one. "Come to me, ye who are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," said another; and a third seemed to reply in tender and loving language: "As the hart panteth after the fountains of waters, so my soul panteth after thee, O God."

Sybil paused in the act of passing through the cloister. She had faith and imagination, and this silent language appealed to both, and sent a sort of remorse through her heart. How could she murmur at her lot, so calm and fair, when others had found happiness and content within these narrow walls.

"I wish I were better," thought Sybil, looking up at the roof of blue sky which spread above her —"I wish I were great, or heroic, or, at least, good, instead of being the silly, frivolous little thing I am. I know I am little—little in person, little in mind, little in temper—it is quite disheartening. What business had I to go down to the kitchen to Denise, and what business have I

to go and look at this stranger? Arria would not have done it."

Now Arria, the wife of Pœtus, was one of Sybil's favourite heroines; for this young lady's mind was rather full of the classics just then. But logic, pitiless logic, whispered that though Arria died nobly, she might have lived simply.

"Suppose some stranger came to her father's house," thought Sybil; "why, she would have felt it her duty to look at him from a distance, and see if he was to be trusted in the atrium. Why, then, should not I?"

This settled the question. Sybil passed through that portion of the cloister which had once been allotted to the novices, ran up an old staircase, and entered a room which commanded a good view of the lower garden.

There were two gardens in Saint Vincent. One, on a level with the house, was enclosed by high walls; the other, to which a flight of stone steps gave access, was a broad terrace, extensively laid out with tall trees, that nodded to the sea breeze. A steep cliff that overlooked the sea was its only limit towards the west; a small wood, and the stream on the banks of which stood Mr. Kennedy's

mill, divided it from the neighbouring country. This portion of Mr. Kennedy's possessions had flowers and gravelled walks, and therefore could be called a garden, though it soon lost these attributes and became wild and uncultivated; but the real garden was that which now lay within Sybil's view. This was narrow, quiet, and sunny. Old mossy walls enclosed it, and flowers grew in their shelter. In the centre of a large grass-plot stood an ancient sun-dial, and over this the stranger now pored, in an attitude which displayed the extraordinary length of his figure. He was anything but a fine man in Sybil's opinion. He was long and lean, and most melancholy-looking; he had a sallow face, and heavy black eyes, and lank black hair, and he looked so dismal withal, that Sybil felt his was no pleasant countenance to gaze on. His clothes were shabby, too; and his carpet-bag, which lay on the grass by him, was but a small one. Sybil wondered what had brought him, who he was, and what series of troubles had given him that woebegone aspect? After various surmises, she came to the conclusion that he was either a childless widower (a broken-hearted one, of course), or a shipwrecked traveller.

She leaned towards the latter hypothesis; and, indeed, it was the right one. The stranger you now gaze at, Sybil, never had either wife or child, and the sorrow you read in his face springs not from their loss. But he has travelled along some of life's most rugged paths, and he is footsore and weary. He has been wrecked on one of life's darkest and most barren shores, and he has saved nothing from that fair ship which sailed the other morning full of promise, hope, and all good things. Pity him, you happy child of fortune, pity him, and pray that the goal of his sad journey may not be sadder still than the road which has led him to it thus far.

CHAPTER II.

"POOR man!" thought Sybil, still looking at him from the window, "how tired he looks. His clothes are dusty, too. He surely never came on foot. I must tell Narcisse to show him in after all."

But even as Sybil came to this humane resolution, she saw her father coming down the flight of steps that led from the upper into the lower garden. Mr. Kennedy was a very handsome man; he was fifty, but he looked full ten years younger. There was not a silver thread in his dark curls; his blue eyes were as bright as at twenty; his pleasant, genial smile lit his face like sunshine, and showed teeth of perfect whiteness. His look, indeed, was not without subtlety; and if his smile was pleasant, every one could not read its meaning. Prosperity, content, and cheerfulness were written in his handsome countenance and erect bearing; and

Sybil, who was very proud of her father's good looks and fine person, looked at him with secret admiration, and contrasted him with that lean, sallow traveller, very much to the disadvantage of the latter.

Mr. Kennedy came down whistling carelessly, but suddenly grew silent and stood still—he had seen his visitor. A change, rapid and deep, passed over his countenance. At once it expressed surprise, annoyance, and Sybil thought, dislike. Her pity for the tired stranger was gone in a moment. He had come to annoy and trouble her father, and from that hour she detested him.

But Mr. Kennedy was a man of the world, accustomed to control and to conceal his feelings, and by the time the stranger turned round, the master of Saint Vincent was calm, cheerful, and smiling, and came forward with open brow and extended hand.

"How do you do, Smith?" he said, cordially. "How kind of you to come and look at me down here. Everything is going on beautifully—beautifully."

"So much the better for you," replied Mr. Smith, since such was his name; "but look at me."

"Why, yes," said Mr. Kennedy, slapping him on the shoulder, "any one can see what you have been about."

"Yes, a fool and his money are soon parted," replied Mr. Smith, with a moody look in his heavy black eyes.

"Nonsense," said Mr. Kennedy, cheerfully. "I dare say it is something glorious. You shall tell me all about it after dinner, or to-morrow, when a good night's sleep will have cleared your ideas; and now come in."

They entered the house together, and disappeared from Sybil's view. Soon afterwards she was called down by Mr. Kennedy, formally introduced to Mr. Smith, and requested to see that a room was prepared for him, and that the dinner was hurried. Both orders were obeyed, and Mr. Kennedy, his daughter, and Mr. Smith soon sat down to a very good dinner in the low, quiet dining-room of Saint Vincent.

The light of the declining sun poured in through the open windows on the polished oak floor, and up the wainscoted walls. From where she sat Sybil could see the trees of the garden stirring in the breeze, and the sweet scent of the wall-flowers

came in with every breath of air; birds fluttered and twittered past the windows—everything was bright, gay, and cheerful; but Sybil looked at Mr. Smith, and she felt depressed. How is it that some people have this power of darkening whatever comes within their reach or ken? There was no poetic melancholy about Mr. Smith, not a trace of it, and yet many people would have felt as Sybil felt—that he was depressing. This man, a vulgar one by his manners, and his free use of the letter H, who ate rather too greedily, and had a selfish eye to the daintiest morsels; who squared his elbows on the table, and talked of, and evidently thought of nothing, save some incomprehensible lawsuit with a Mr. Dermot, had, with all that, a look of sullen power and tenacity which made most men and women feel that it was pleasanter to be out of than in his company.

"He is like an ugly black sky when the storm is coming on," thought Sybil; and she wondered that her father did not seem to feel it, and that he could talk, and laugh, and jest so freely with that horrid Mr. Smith.

But most of all she wondered that he was acquainted with him. Indeed, Mr. Kennedy's friend-

liness and courtesy to Mr. Smith were something remarkable. Mr. Kennedy was a self-made man, and, like most self-made men, rather proud. He had a natural refinement, cultivated by a tardy though good education, which made him fastidious—sometimes to excess. Yet there he was, hand-and-glove with that low Mr. Smith, listening civilly to his poor jokes, laughing at them even, helping him to the best, humouring him, and actually seeming to enjoy his dreary company. Youth is quick, and cannot be all deceived. Sybil felt sure a good deal of her father's friendliness was assumed. She would not have acknowledged it, even to herself, but she knew it, and with the logic of the heart—not always the wisest or the best—she infused a double amount of severity into her disapprobation of Mr. Smith.

And Mr. Smith did his best to justify Miss Kennedy's dislike. He ignored her completely, barely nodded his thanks when she helped him, and, as dinner progressed, he aspirated the letter H more and more, or less and less, as the case might be, and became even more dogmatic and tiresome than at the commencement of the meal. This Sybil attributed to his having drunk a good deal, and the fact did not heighten her opinion of the poor gentleman.

Unconscious of her displeasure, Mr. Smith only warmed as he spoke of his lawsuit with Mr. Dermot, whose name he brought up with ever-increasing bitterness.

"I know you stand by him," he said, nodding at Mr. Kennedy; "but it won't do. If there's law in Ireland, I'll have him fast!—I'll clench him!"

And he struck his fist on the table till it rang again.

"Suppose there is no law in Ireland," coolly said Mr. Kennedy.

Mr. Smith's dull black eyes got a sudden flash.

"I'll make law!" he said under his breath.

Sybil felt uneasy and frightened; but her father only laughed, and replied gaily,

"More easily said than done."

"Where there's a will there's a way," said Mr. Smith.

But there was a tipsy drawl in his tone, and Sybil began to feel more disgusted than depressed. Her father thought, however, she had enough of this, for he looked at her, and said significantly,

"Dull work for you, Pussy."

"Yes, and I have been dull all day," replied

Sybil reproachfully. "You took away the key of the library."

Mr. Kennedy belonged to the modern generation of obedient papas; but though he looked contrite on hearing his daughter's remonstrance, he did not give her the key, for which she held out her hand.

"Pussy," he said, "I do not like to let a little girl like you run wild in that library. I know nothing of all these books."

"Oh! there are no novels amongst them," impatiently said Sybil. "They are all such old books."

"None the better for that," put in Mr. Smith, for the first time uttering a remark directed to Sybil.

He looked at her across the table, bending his heavy black eyes upon her with a moody gaze which annoyed and offended the young girl.

"Old books are often old sinners," pursued Mr. Smith, staring at Sybil; "and what has a slip of a girl like you, miss, to do with such?"

"I like them," drily replied Sybil.

"And what has liking to do with it?" insisted Mr. Smith, in a drawling tone. "I don't like to be 'ere, not I, and yet I am 'ere. Your father

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does not like me to be 'ere, and yet he has me 'ere. We all do what we don't like, miss."

"Nonsense," said Mr. Kennedy gaily. "What put that into your head, Mr. Smith?"

"Why, it stands to reason. I have come down on business that you don't like—just as that Dermot don't like——"

"No such thing," curtly interrupted Mr. Kennedy. "I am delighted to see you here. And now, Pussy," he added, turning to his daughter, "what were you reading?"

"The Greek Fathers. Not in Greek, you know."

"The Greek Fathers," said Mr. Kennedy smiling, and pinching her cheek. "Well, I suppose I may trust you with the Greek Fathers. There, take the key, and do not forget teatime, as you did last night."

Sybil nodded, and, glad to escape from Mr. Smith and his sullen black eyes, she lightly ran away, dangling the key on her little finger.

"I wonder what that horrid Mr. Smith came for?" she thought as she entered the library. "He looks like a cheat, every bit of him. I wish I had told him I was all for Mr. Dermot.

How he would have stared with his big black eyes!"

The vision of Mr. Smith's amazement tickled Sybil's fancy, but only for a moment. She stood in the library, and with a sigh of relief forgot all else.

What reader has not felt the charm of those quiet rooms devoted to study and knowledge, where the silent wisdom of ages patiently waits the student's hand. Stillness and peace are in the very air we breathe. On the threshold cease the toils and pleasures and varieties of daily life. A sense of rest steals over the heart with the sight of those volumes that appeal to the mind alone, and let the passions sleep. Fever, excitement, agitation, our lot abroad, are succeeded here by a luxurious intellectual repose, soothing as that of the fabled Lotus, but neither torpid nor enfeebling.

And Sybil was a reader, such a reader as seventeen alone can yield—eager, unwearied, and impassioned. Whenever she entered that long low room, with windows that opened on the cloister and shelves full of ancient books, Sybil no longer felt that Saint Vincent was a dreary old house, but confessed it in her heart to be a sunny Eden.

The Abbey of Saint Vincent had belonged to the Renneville family, from whom Mr. Kennedy had purchased it, ready furnished, books and all; and an old abbé had stocked the library with volumes grave, austere, and ponderous, and never meant for seventeen and girlhood. But young and gay though she was, Sybil also was of a mind and temper to relish the most vigorous intellectual food. Of course she would have liked a poem or a story better than the fathers, Greek or Latin; but failing these, she could enjoy and feel the majesty of an Athanasius, the sweetness of a Basil, and the subtle beauty of an Augustine.

She now took down Saint Ephrem the Syrian, and sitting in the deep embrasure of one of the windows, she read his account of the last great day. At first Sybil felt calm enough, but as the Eastern imagery of this impressive writer rose before her, as, at his call, she saw and heard those dead or yet unborn multitudes of all times and all nations appearing before the Eternal Judge, a sense of awe stole over her, and, half closing the book, she looked out into the darkening cloister. Strange fancies came to her. She was herself an actor in that great scene, and a spectator, too. The nuns of the abbey were

there in their black veils, and so was her aunt Miss Glyn; and she saw her dearest friend, Blanche Cains, with her fair hair flowing around her, and her father, stern and downcast, and Mr. Smith rising in his grave-clothes, with a scared look in his heavy black eyes.

Beyond this Sybil would not go. She rose nervously, for the library was almost dark, and she had a childish fear of darkness. The dim and ghostly outlines of everything around her made the simplest object appalling. There was terror lurking in the dark shelves and in the darker books upon them. Mr. Smith had called them old sinners—suppose they came down from these shelves with spectre life in them. But no—"I will not be a coward," rebelliously thought Sybil, "I will not."

She looked steadily at the pale space of the window, at the dark lines of the cloister beyond it, and beyond these again at a little twinkling star that shone in a black patch of sky, and with her eye fixed upon it, Sybil resolutely walked to the door, let herself out, and did not quicken her step till she reached the door that led to the garden. Into this she flew, and breathed freely on re-

cognising Denise and Narcisse, who were watering the flowers.

The night was balmy and serene. True heavenly calmness filled those fields of blue sky, where brilliant stars had been sown by an Almighty hand. There was a perfume of flowers on the night air, and afar off you heard the faint roaring of the sea.

"What a coward I was," thought Sybil remorsefully; "and I was afraid of those poor old books, too! I wonder who read these fathers before me?"

She applied to Denise for information, but all Denise knew was that the abbé had been a great reader.

"As to that, so was the young Count de Renneville, and he had taken away a good many books with him to the Manor of Raymond."

"Raymond!—who was Raymond?"

Denise was amazed at her young mistress's ignorance. She thought that the whole world had heard of Raymond, the great seaman, who made war on kings, and whose ships covered the seas. But then he lived a long time ago, a thousand years at least.

"And the Renneville's have gone to live in his manor—how is that, Denise?"

"Madame de Renneville is one of his descendants, and they have no other house left now, either mother or son—ah! what a good son he is, there never was one like him, but they are so poor. They could not keep Saint Vincent, so they sold it to pay the debts."

"And where is the Manor of Raymond?"

"Off there on the hill, where you see a light burning. It is the old grey stone house with turrets, you know."

Sybil knew it well. She saw these turrets daily from her room window. She saw the light now, and looked at it half sadly. Ah! what a wheel was life! Her father, a child of fortune, sprung from naught, enriched by a few lucky ventures, had succeeded the impoverished nobles, as they had succeeded the quiet nuns. Truly that old grey Saint Vincent was but an inn, where the guests followed fast.

"I wonder who will be in it after us," thought Sybil—"who will have my room, and walk in the garden, and read those books I am reading now? The old Abbé de Renneville little thought a girl

would come to take up his classics and his fathers of the Church. He, too, read that Saint Ephrem's vision of Judgment, for I found his notes on the margin. I wonder if he, too, saw his friends and acquaintances in the great multitude, as I saw mine."

"I'd 'ave that cross down, and the cloister too," said Mr. Smith's dogmatic voice.

Sybil started. In her abstraction she had walked up to the open dining-room window, and from that apartment it was that Mr. Smith's voice now proceeded. She saw him too—for the room was lit—sullen, tenacious, half-insolent; and she saw her father, calm, smiling, courteous. Why, who was that vulgar, ill-bred man, who spoke of having both cross and cloister down? At once Sybil built a little castle in the air, as it was rather her way to do; but this castle was neither pleasant nor sunlit. It showed her a dreary story of falsehood and ruin, in which Mr. Kennedy figured as victim, and that ended by rewarding villainy in the person of Mr. Smith, with the possession of Saint Vincent. Mr. Kennedy and his daughter had just entered the carriage that was to take them away, and Mr. Smith was nodding and grinning at them

from a window, when Mr. Kennedy's cheerful voice called out,

"Pussy, Pussy, come and make the tea."

Sybil obeyed the summons, and felt ashamed of herself as she looked at Mr. Smith. He might be low, ill-bred, and depressing, but surely he was honest—there was no cunning, no subtle wickedness in this man's countenance or bearing. Again Sybil relented towards him, and felt that pity for him which had been her first feeling as she looked at him from the window. But some people cannot be their own friends. Mr. Smith, who had been a bore at dinner, was insufferable at tea-time. He was more than depressing now, he was thoroughly disagreeable. Sybil looked at him indignantly, and thought him once more capable of every iniquity; indeed, she had no comfort till tea was over, and she went up to the drawing-room. But to this comfort there was a drawback—Sybil spent the evening alone. Instead of playing to her father, as was her wont, she played to herself in the drawing-room, which seemed very large and lonely. The wax lights which burned in the dark bronze candlesticks on the mantelshelf only showed Sybil how vacant was that wide apartment, when

her father's handsome person and cheerful countenance were absent from it. She played languidly, without spirit or pleasure; then she played not at all. She threw herself in one of the deep, old-fashioned, red velvet chairs, and brooded over her wrongs. Why was she sacrificed to that abominable Mr Smith? Why did not her father get rid of him? If she could only have Saint Vincent back again without him, Sybil would never more think it dreary—never. Surely part of the happiness of the nuns of the old abbey must have lain in being rid for ever of such beings as Mr. Smith. For of course no such intruders came upon them with their carpet-bags, and absorbed their fathers. Of course not; and yet suppose she should go and ask Denise?

The wish, we may be sure, was father to this thought, for with considerable alacrity Sybil rose and went straight to the room near her own, where Denise sat mending linen every evening. Nothing could exceed Denise's surprise on hearing her young mistress gravely ask her if any feminine prototypes of Mr. Smith had ever troubled the nuns of Saint Vincent.

"Why, from the moment they entered it, till

they died, no stranger ever saw them," replied Denise. "It was the beautiful abbess who laid down that rule."

"The beautiful abbess!—who was she?—and how did people know she was beautiful, if no one ever saw these good ladies?"

"Why, you see the abbey had been burnt down, and had to be rebuilt, and a new abbess and ten nuns came to take possession. It was a grand sight, with banners and crosses, and a procession and a great crowd; and when the nuns reached the gates, they passed by the abbess as they entered. When the last was within, the abbess turned to the people and said, 'Farewell, friends.' Every one answered, 'Farewell, holy mother;' and a young man, bolder than the rest, cried out, 'Holy mother, let us see you before you leave us?' Now, you see, this good lady, a young widow, whom the death of her husband had caused to forsake the world, took the request in holy charity, and not perhaps as it was meant. So she raised her veil, and all saw her, and hers was the most beautiful face any one there had ever seen. It shone like an angel's, and dazzled them all, till the abbess dropped her veil, entered the abbey, and barred

the gates. And they do say that the young man died of love; but Narcisse will have it that if so, he was an oyster. At all events the beautiful abbess heard of it, and laid down the rule that none of her ladies was to be seen by a stranger from that day forward."

Sybil thought this a hard case, and it rather reconciled her to Mr. Smith's presence. Indeed, she was beginning to feel quite lenient towards that gentleman, when unluckily she heard her father escorting him to his room. This act of hospitable condescension roused her wrath anew. What business had he to be in Saint Vincent at all? It was dreadful—of course it was. She immediately felt a violent headache, and informing Denise of the fact, forthwith retired to her room, locked herself up, and went to bed.

Spite her headache and her wrongs, Sybil was asleep in five minutes. But the troubles of the day were renewed in her dreams. She saw the abbey not as it was, a ruin repaired and converted into a dwelling-house, but as it had been—a fair Gothic building. She saw the beautiful abbess, too, with a fair shining face, and her nuns, and she heard them singing sweetly the psalm *Lætavi* as

they crossed the threshold of their home, and vanished behind its gates. So far her visions were pleasant, but unluckily some grotesque and gloomy images mingled with these mediæval fancies. She saw Mr. Kennedy lying dead and bleeding at the convent gates, and Mr. Smith bending over him with wicked joy in his black sullen eyes; and, to crown all, Mr. Smith wore her aunt Glyn's favourite pink cap.

"Oh! that dreadful bore of a man," thought Sybil, wakening—"I do wish he would go!"

CHAPTER III.

BUT Mr. Smith did not go away, nor seem inclined to do so. He remained in Saint Vincent, boring Sybil more and more, but endured with perfect patience by Sybil's father. Luckily the two gentlemen spent the greatest portion of their time in Mr. Kennedy's mill; for Mr. Kennedy had a mill, and one which for a year had been the talk of Saint Vincent.

This little watering-place, in which there is, as there must ever be in a French town, an English colony, is neither pretty nor remarkable. It has a port, some shipping, and to a certain degree it is wealthy. A pretty but sluggish and shallow river flows through it. This stream had always been pronounced deficient in water power, when, to the surprise and amusement of his neighbours, Mr. Kennedy, who had just purchased the abbey, built a large mill on the river that passed through his

grounds. Their amusement ripened into scorn when they learned that this foolish stranger was buying land far and near in order to grow rape-seed, and, of course, to make rape oil. This was the greatest folly of all. The soil of Saint Vincent was unpropitious to rape. Although Mr. Kennedy had asked none to advise him, and might have been left to his fate, some kind people could not bear to see him going to ruin, and went and enlightened him concerning his double mistake. Mr. Kennedy heard, and smiled, and thanked, and persisted in his obstinacy, and went on building his mill, and sowing rape.

Time justified him, and proved his best answer and most powerful argument. Some ingenious contrivances trebled the water power on Mr. Kennedy's property, but as he owned the river till it flowed into the sea, these contrivances added nothing to the wealth or convenience of his neighbours up the stream, and yet had the great advantage of not being subject to their interference. They could see and envy, and could not mar. Moreover, as spring came round, Mr. Kennedy's land became covered with yellow blossoms

so luxuriant that the like had never been seen. Rape throve in Saint Vincent, and throve wonderfully. Day after day waggon-loads of it passed within Mr. Kennedy's gates. The roads were black with the rich seed; the mill was set in motion, and made a noise that was heard ever so far off. Sinewy men, who earned untold sums, it was said, laboured day and night to extract the oil; their cottages dotted Mr. Kennedy's land, and of a tame agricultural district this enterprising stranger soon made as prosperous a little nook as was to be found on the whole coast.

But little care youth and girlhood for commerce, enterprise, and money. Sybil disliked the mill, for it was a rival, and took a great deal too much of her father's time and affection; if anything, therefore, could add to her aversion for Mr. Smith, it was the fact that he combined with that hateful mill to absorb Mr. Kennedy. So she went on lamenting that gentleman's presence in Saint Vincent, and declaring to herself that there had never been anything so dreadful. But she soon learned to her cost that Mr. Smith could add to the sum of his iniquities.

They were at breakfast on the third morning of

Mr. Smith's sojourn in Saint Vincent, when a great rattling of wheels was heard at the gates. Sybil clapped her hands, and started up in great joy.

"Aunt Glyn!" she cried.

"I fancy there are two carriages," said Mr. Kennedy, rising more slowly. "Mrs. Mush, I suppose."

Sybil paused on her way to the door, to look with surprise at her father. Mr. Kennedy was a fond and indulgent parent, but he was not a communicative one. It was plain that he had asked Mrs. Mush to come, and that he had thought fit to tell his daughter nothing about it. Sybil was all the more puzzled at this double invitation, that, though her aunt, Miss Glyn, and her cousin, Mrs. Mush, were relatives and friends, they had always found it impossible to live in the same house. Their friendship could stand yearly, and even monthly meetings, but it went down at weekly, and froze at daily intercourse. The admission of one was, therefore, the exclusion of the other. Mr. Kennedy knew this as well as Sybil, but he wanted to be sure of one lady to keep house for him, in case the other did not suit. He had accordingly

asked them both at the same time, feeling confident of his power to keep them at peace during a fortnight, at least, for he had mentally fixed this as the limit to their time of probation. Without heeding his daughter's amazed look, he therefore went to meet his guests, and bid them welcome.

From one carriage stepped down a tall, bony, and angular lady of fifty—this was Miss Glyn. From the other carriage buoyantly alighted a younger and stouter lady, with a full person, a round, good-humoured face, and a pair of twinkling grey eyes—this was Mrs. Mush. The two ladies had travelled from opposite directions, and only recognized each other as they now stood at the gates of Saint Vincent. For a moment they stared at each other in mute amazement; then Miss Glyn turned crimson, and looked at her carriage, as if she felt inclined to step back into it forthwith; whilst Mrs. Mush burst out laughing, and shook her forefinger at Mr. Kennedy.

Miss Glyn recovered first. Mr. Kennedy could not mean to keep them both—Saint Vincent must needs be a battle-field—and for Sybil's sake she would stay and expel the enemy.

"How are you, Mrs. Mush?" she inquired, with much stateliness.

"Oh! quite well," airily replied Mrs. Mush. "We did not expect this meeting, did we, Mary? We ought to be very much obliged to Mr. Kennedy!"

"I am obliged to Mr. Kennedy," stiffly said Miss Glyn.

Sybil looked as she felt, much confused; but her father was delightfully easy and hospitable.

"It gladdens me to see you both, ladies," he said, gaily. "Poor little Pussy has been so dull alone here with me, but she will cheer up now in your society."

Miss Glyn drew herself up coldly, and tried to keep Mr. Kennedy at a distance; but he gently broke through these gossamer trammels, and triumphantly entered the house with a lady on either arm. Sybil followed, thinking: "I like Aunt Glyn best, but then I shall be very sorry if Mrs. Mush goes. What a pity we cannot have them both."

It was a pity, no doubt, for each of these ladies had good points in her way. Miss Glyn was very fond of Sybil, kind, and rigidly honest. Mrs.

Mush was a happy, indolent, good-tempered, and entertaining widow, who amused Sybil infinitely, for, as she never felt dull herself, she had the happy gift of not letting others feel dull in her company. But for all that, she could not live in Miss Glyn's society, and Sybil only wondered how long either lady would remain. Her estimation, founded on past experience, varied from three days to a week. Mrs. Mush, to do her justice, was all for peace and conciliation. She liked the broad, comfortable look of the old abbey, and wished to stay in it as long as she could.

"You need not mind me, my dear," she said, noticing Sybil's perplexed look, as her father devolved upon her the duty of escorting the ladies to their respective apartments. "Just show me the door of my room, and I shall soon make myself comfortable with a nap—no breakfast like that."

Sybil gave her a grateful look, but Miss Glyn took the concession as her due, and entered her room with considerable stiffness of bearing. She looked around her, nodded her approbation, and said briefly,

"I see that a month hence I shall have roses looking in at my window."

"We have roses everywhere," heedlessly said Sybil; "Mrs. Mush has them, too."

"But I do not suppose Mrs. Mush means to wait for their blooming," coldly replied Miss Glyn; "indeed I shall simply consider it out of the question. This seems a very rambling sort of house, Sybil."

"It is very pleasant, aunt. Will you look over it?"

Miss Glyn, being of a quick and warm temper, piqued herself on the opposite attributes of composure and calmness. With a lofty smile, she answered that there was plenty of time to see the house.

"It is very comfortable, aunt," persisted Sybil, "and if that horrid Mr. Smith would only go away, I should think it faultless now."

Miss Glyn paused in the act of untying her bonnet strings to ask "who Mr. Smith was."

"Oh! such a dreadful vulgar man, who doesn't aspirate the letter H, and who came here the other day with a carpet-bag."

"A carpet-bag!" exclaimed Miss Glyn amazed; "why did he not bring a trunk?"

"I daresay because he has nothing to put into

one, poor man," replied Sybil, with a touch of pity.

Miss Glyn's amazement became indignation. She was surprised, she confessed, that Mr. Kennedy asked such a person. Sybil nodded mysteriously, and fancied that Mr. Smith had come unasked.

"And Mr. Kennedy tolerates the liberty!" exclaimed Miss Glyn; "absurd!"

And Miss Glyn kindly resolved to put down Mr. Smith without loss of time.

Mrs. Mush might require the restorative of a nap before she could show herself again, but Miss Glyn, who laboured under no such necessity, was soon ready to accompany her niece downstairs, and take a freshening cup of tea.

"Miss Glyn, Mr. Smith," said Mr. Kennedy in a slight careless tone.

Miss Glyn stared at Mr. Smith, who returned the stare with interest, and war was declared forthwith.

Miss Glyn had secretly taken objection to Mr. Smith's carpet-bag, which she had not seen, and Mr. Smith now found fault with the pink ribbons on her cap which he saw. So, whilst Miss Glyn

drank her tea, and ignored him, he squared his elbows on the table, and stared at her with a sneer.

Mr. Kennedy, who saw towards which end matters were progressing, succeeded in taking him away, by suggesting a visit to the mill; but a rolling stone only acquires new impetus when it is momentarily checked in its downward course. So it proved with Mr. Smith's silent wrath.

When Miss Glyn had taken her tea, she was equal to a survey of the house. It was slow, minute, and somewhat censorious.

"I don't like that goggle-eyed French maid of yours," she said to Sybil; "and it is ridiculous to have a man-servant called Narcissus. The house would not be amiss if were it not for the staircases, which are absurd; and I don't much like the cloister, Sybil, but I shall improve all that."

Sybil looked as she felt, a little disturbed. She much doubted if her father would allow Miss Glyn to improve matters in Saint Vincent. But Miss Glyn had come to rule, and no more doubted her power than her vocation. Indeed there was a magnanimous security about her, which showed

how calmly fixed was her purpose. Thus, when Mrs. Mush came down refreshed and rosy, Miss Glyn was all courtesy and condescension.

"Have a cup of tea, Mrs. Mush?" she said; "it will do you a world of good."

"Thank you, Mary, I breakfasted before coming."

"Would you like to see the house, Mrs. Mush? It might amuse you."

"Oh! I have already peeped about. I like that cloister, Sybil—a drowsy-looking place."

"Perhaps you would like to go and sit there—perhaps you would prefer it to the garden?" persisted Miss Glyn, obstinately kind and courteous; "let us have chairs in the cloister, Sybil—Mrs. Mush likes it."

Mrs. Mush yielded good-humouredly to Miss Glyn's patronizing; and Sybil, pleased to see them so friendly, went and fetched chairs herself; then ran up for Miss Glyn's work; then, at her aunt's bidding, went for Mrs. Mush's; and finally brought down her own, and sat down with the two ladies in the cool shady part of the cloister.

How pleasant it looked, thought Sybil, with its sharp shade and sunshine, and the old grey

cross, and the high slender grasses that shot from every cranny, and the yellow wall-flowers that grew on the edge of the roof, and danced all golden and sunlit on the blue sky. Oh! if Aunt Glyn and Mrs. Mush could only agree and remain both in Saint Vincent. Mr. Kennedy, who suddenly entered the cloister, also thought it was very pleasant to see his daughter sitting with ladies whose society could not but improve her, and engaged in some of those feminine tasks which she was rather prone to neglect, for reading in the library or for long rambles in the grounds. How pretty and demure she looked thus with her basket of wools by her side, and her nimble fingers scattering roses on her canvas. He could not help contrasting her with Miss Glyn and Mrs. Mush; one sat upright in her chair, stitching with the vigorous determination of getting through her work; the other leaned back, and wielded her needle as if she felt its weight. Sybil alone was quick, without effort, and worked as if her task could neither fatigue nor weary her. He sat down on the lowest step of the cross, and looked at her admiringly; and Mr. Smith, who also came up, sat near him, and stretched his long legs, and

looked at Miss Glyn's pink cap with unmitigated aversion.

"What a pretty pattern that is, Pussy," said Mr. Kennedy, glancing at his daughter's work.

"It is a beautiful pattern," said Sybil. "Blanche gave it to me."

"Blanche!—who is Blanche?" sharply asked Miss Glyn.

"Oh! a paragon teacher, whom Pussy raves about," answered Mr. Kennedy.

"She is a paragon," emphatically said Sybil.

"Very handsome, of course?"

"Handsome!—beautiful."

"Very intellectual and accomplished?"

Sybil's pretty lips smiled, as much as to say, "I should think so."

"And amiable?"

"The sweetest, best, and dearest creature that ever breathed," cried Sybil, with a vehemence that brought tears of emotion to her dark eyes.

"Nonsense," shortly said Miss Glyn.

Sybil looked indignant; but Mrs. Mush said gaily,

"My dear, it *is* nonsense. You see, we have all passed through the disease. There is a wonder-

ful amount of veneration, and worship, and adoration in a young girl's heart, and it must come out. There must be some hero or heroine to adore, some angelic creature or other near whom the rest of human kind are but dross, and you are in the season for that complaint. It is best it should be so, my dear," she added, with a not unkind twinkle of her grey eye; "only beware the wakening, my love—beware the wakening."

"I wonder where she picks it up," thought Miss Glyn, with secret envy; for she did envy, so far as her upright and generous nature allowed, Mrs. Mush's fluency. It was so much finer than her "nonsense," whilst it meant precisely the same thing. But Sybil was not charmed.

"It is not nonsense," she said; "Blanche *is* everything I say."

"How old is she, Pussy?"

"Twenty-four years and ten months next Tuesday."

"She knows her very birthday," said Miss Glyn.

"Come, now, Pussy, give us a good description of the fair lady. She *is* fair—I know that, so go on."

"Tall, and a most charming figure."

"Blue eyes, of course?"

"The softest blue eyes, a straight nose, and a sweet smile. The complexion of a rose, and teeth like a row of pearls."

"Very like a wax doll in a 'airdresser's shop," put in Mr. Smith.

Sybil gave him a scornful look, whilst Mr. Kennedy remarked soothingly,

"No, no, Smith, a real beauty; and now for her mind, Pussy."

"A noble one!" cried Sybil; "and a noble heart too."

"A sweet temper, of course?"

"Of course."

"I believe you have nothing to add?"

"Indeed I have! Blanche Cains is of a very good family."

"But poor, or she would not be a music teacher in Brompton. Well, then, Pussy, her beauty, &c.—her accomplishments, &c.—her goodness, &c.—and the rest will not weigh one ounce in the scale of life without money. And you, my little Pussy, who have a turned-up nose, no beauty to speak of, but little wit, a sharp tongue, and a quick temper, no birth, if I may say so, but a good

round portion of some thousands, you will outweigh the angelic, accomplished, well-born Blanche Cains any day."

On hearing this tolerably worldly speech, Sybil coloured up to the roots of her dark hair, and cast around her a look, which was very like a look of defiance.

"I know that everyone has a prejudice against poor dear Blanche," she cried warmly; "but I don't care, and I shall always make much of her."

Having said this, Miss Kennedy picked up her work, and her wools, and reckless of a fallen ball, which unwound as she went, dancing after her on the flags of the cloister, she walked away with great stateliness.

Mr. Kennedy laughed, Miss Glyn seemed offended, and Mrs. Mush, looking thoughtfully after Sybil, for once made a short speech.

"Poor little thing!" she said.

"A little vixen!" observed Mr. Kennedy.

"No—but young—very young," replied Mrs. Mush. "Don't you know that the young and the old use the same words, and don't speak the same language Talk of the hardship of being alone amongst strangers—why, the young are

always amongst strangers. They are hurt, and wronged, and ill-used, ay, and robbed, too, at every turn. Who spares them a stab? No one. Who does not attempt to despoil them? No one. Why, here have we all been stinging the poor child, till she turns upon us, and no wonder. She loves her friend. Miss Glyn says 'Nonsense.' I warn her the friend will prove false; and you, Mr. Kennedy, show her that the standard of all worth is money. And the worst is, we mean what we say."

Mr. Kennedy smiled. Yes, he did mean it. He was proud, and lest others should remind him of the humility of his birth, he ever brought it up with a sort of defiance. He was a self-made man, and he gloried in having fought his way up. He held wealth the supreme good, because the world held it such, yet he yielded the ignoble deity but a half-worship. He was proud of his daughter, but he knew how little the world would care for her without his money, and he half agreed with, and half scorned, that sordid world's verdict.

Now, whilst Mrs. Mush was philosophising, and Mr. Kennedy was listening to that fluent lady, the war was going on between Miss Glyn and Mr. Smith.

Miss Glyn resumed hostilities by staring at Mr. Smith, then by ignoring him more than ever. Mr. Smith, though not a refined man, was a sensitive one; and as his objection to Miss Glyn's cap became more bitter and troublesome, he thought proper to join in the conversation, and express it. He did so, just as Sybil returned to the cloister with the shade of wool she had made-believe to go and fetch.

"Have you ever been in Yorkshire, Miss?" said Mr. Smith addressing Sybil.

Sybil coolly denied all knowledge of Yorkshire.

"The girls are very fond of pink down in those parts," said Mr. Smith.

Miss Glyn shook the streamers of her cap in defiance, and went on stitching.

"But then they're young," persisted Mr. Smith.

Miss Glyn threaded her needle, and smiled in scorn. She did not care a pin about her age.

"Old girls never wear pink down there," persisted Mr. Smith.

Miss Glyn put down her work, and looked up in mute indignation. She had been called "an old girl" in her brother-in-law's house.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said rising slowly, "the

company you keep is not much to my taste. Do not wonder if I decline remaining in your house."

"Mr. Smith, you must apologise," peremptorily said Mr. Kennedy.

"I shall do no such thing," replied Mr. Smith, sullenly. "Why did she stare at me?"

"I shall accept of no apology," calmly said Miss Glyn, folding up her work—"I require none; but I object to the company you keep, Mr. Kennedy."

She slowly walked away, followed by Sybil, who vainly endeavoured to pacify her. Mr. Kennedy, who went after them also, did his best in vain. Mr. Smith remained behind, biting his nails, and looking at Mrs. Mush with all the might of his black eyes.

"She's mad, you know," he said at length; and having delivered this oracular speech, he too walked off.

Nothing—no prayer, no argument—could move Miss Glyn from her purpose.

"I am not angry with you, Mr. Kennedy," she magnanimously said; "but if you cannot help having those foolish, low-bred people about you, I can help being in their company."

"Mary, Smith shall apologise," began Mr. Kennedy; but Miss Glyn interrupted him—

"You do not suppose I am so absurd as to require the creature's apology?" she said—"no, no; but I do wonder you keep him about you. Suppose, even, you owe him money, why don't you pay him, and get rid of him? And even if you cannot, you need not give him board and lodging; and suppose you choose to give him board and lodging, you can keep him at a distance."

Now if Miss Glyn expected either denial or assent to these remarks, she was disappointed. Mr. Kennedy coldly regretted she was not to be persuaded, and left her. After this Sybil's tears and entreaties proved wholly unavailing. Miss Glyn sat in her room with her bonnet on, waiting for the carriage, which had to be fetched two miles off, fanning herself with her pocket-handkerchief, declaring she was quite cool, quite calm, and not the least angry, though it was absurd to suppose she would tolerate Mr. Smith's impertinence.

When the carriage came at length, and two hours elapsed before Narcisse returned with it, Miss Glyn took her leave with the stateliness of

an ambassador going away before a declaration of war between two rival powers, and in true courtly and diplomatic language assured her brother-in-law that her affection and regard for him were as strong as ever. Mr. Kennedy heard her civilly, bade her a polite adieu, but did not press her to promise a speedy return. Sybil noticed it, and said a little anxiously, as her aunt's carriage drove away,

"Aunt has promised to come back."

"So much the better, my dear," calmly said Mr. Kennedy; and thus Mr. Smith virtually expelled Miss Glyn, and Mrs. Mush remained mistress of the field, without having so much as struck a blow.

"I suppose that horrid man will never go away," thought Sybil; but in this she was mistaken, though the manner of his going took her as much by surprise as that of his arrival.

CHAPTER IV.

"MRS. MUSH, I have found out who Mr. Smith is," eagerly said Sybil.

Mrs. Mush, who was comfortably seated in the garden reading her paper, and enjoying the beauty and the freshness of the morning, turned round, and said composedly—

"Indeed!" but she put no question.

Sybil felt provoked. These calm ways of Mrs. Mush's provoked her; they kept her at a greater distance than all Miss Glyn's sternness. You can brave or soften wrath; you cannot conquer indifference—least of all, that which is grafted on prudence. It may be that at heart Mrs. Mush was just as inquisitive as Sybil concerning the enigmatic Mr. Smith; but Mrs. Mush liked Saint Vincent, and its master, and Sybil; she liked, too, the thought of having at last found a resting-place; for Mrs. Mush was poor, and for the last fifteen

years had been visiting her friends,—so all these reasons combined kept her silent, and that silence and discretion combined rendered her highly acceptable to Mr. Kennedy. Sybil, indeed, was anything but charmed with this reserve, but in the present instance the wish of imparting her discovery proved stronger than her annoyance at Mrs. Mush's want of curiosty.

"Yes," she said, triumphantly, "I know who Mr. Smith is—he is the old man of the sea."

"What put that into your 'ead, Miss?" asked a sharp voice behind her.

Sybil turned round in some confusion, and saw the long lanky figure of Mr. Smith emerging from behind some tall shrubs.

"I suppose young ladies think everybody old," resumed Mr. Smith, more good-humouredly—he was not familiar with the Arabian Nights—"but what have I to do with the sea?"

"Oh! nothing," hastily said Sybil. "It was my nonsense, Mr. Smith."

"Just so," said Mr. Smith, walking away. "Girls live on nonsense, I do believe."

Sybil remained rather abashed at this reproof, and resolved to be very stately and dignified with

Mr. Smith at dinner, and keep him at a distance once for all. She was spared the trouble of doing so. Mr. Smith did not appear at dinner. He was looked for in his room, at the mill, in the grounds, in Saint Vincent even, but Mr. Smith had vanished. Mr. Kennedy seemed much perturbed at his disappearance, especially when it was discovered that his carpet-bag too was gone, but he said nothing. The next morning, however, when Sybil came down to breakfast, she learned from Mrs. Mush that Mr. Kennedy had left at five o'clock, without saying where he was going or when he would return.

"But he has three gentlemen coming to dinner!" incredulously exclaimed Sybil.

Mrs. Mush informed her that Mr. Kennedy had sent an apology.

"That horrid Mr. Smith is the cause of it," indignantly cried Sybil.

"I believe that is the postman," said Mrs. Mush, looking out of that dining-room window which commanded a view of the gate.

Sybil jumped out, and forgot Mr. Smith and her wrongs, for suppose the postman should bring her a letter from Blanche Cains. She flew out of

the room. In a second she was at the gate, and Mrs. Mush, who stood in the window watching her, saw her snatch the letter from the slow postman's hand, then turn round, flushed and triumphant, and hold it aloft like a prize, then run away with it and vanish in the garden.

"Happy little simpleton," thought Mrs. Mush, with a smile and a sigh.

And Sybil was happy; her affections were warm and ardent, and these letters were events in her young life. She could not have read them with any one by, and she knew that every one, Mrs. Mush as well as the rest, laughed at her passion for Blanche Cains. She did not care, not she, but still it was pleasanter to be alone, and to feel no unkind or sceptical glance watching her. Far away from both garden and abbey, she now sought in the grounds a spot both solitary and congenial: a grassy hollow sheltered from the north wind by trees which the sea-blast had stunted and warped from their birth, and to the west facing the broad glassy ocean, which spread for miles and miles away. Here Sybil often brought her troubles and her joys, and here she now flung herself breathless and panting on the dewy grass, and

with a beating heart read the letter of her friend. Miss Cains, though the object of a romantic friendship, was not a romantic young lady, and never indulged herself or her friend in romantic epistles. Her letter ran thus:

"DEAR SYBIL,

"This must not be a long scribble. I am wretched, that's all, and Miss Blunt worries me to death. I am sick of life at times, and at others I vow *I will* go through it. You write very pretty letters, but I haven't the time to do it. I say again that I am sick of life, which is more than being bored with a Mr. Smith. Why don't you make Mr. Kennedy take him away—I would. I find this is not to be a letter, but a note. I have been interrupted *seven* times since I began, and must leave off. I wish I had an ark like Noah's dove, but I have been cast upon this horrible Blunt wilderness, and must bear my lot. Good-bye. God bless you, dearest, and write often. Your letters are my only comfort.

"Yours,

"BLANCHE CAINS."

Miss Cains wrote a large bold hand, and these

few lines covered the four pages of her note paper.

"Poor dear Blanche!" thought Sibyl, with a swelling heart, "I must ask papa to let me have her here. He almost promised it, only I cannot let her have aunt's room. I shall give her the green room near mine. I shall get it ready at once, and so when papa comes back, I shall write and ask her to come and give up Miss Blunt. How can they be so unkind to her!"

But, alas! for all planning. Sibyl got the green-room ready, but days, weeks even, went by, and Mr. Kennedy neither wrote nor came back. Sybil forgot her friend's troubles, and felt alarmed and wretched. She was convinced that her father was either ill or in trouble, and that Mr. Smith was at the bottom of it. She said so to Mrs. Mush, who laughed at her; but Sybil persisted—moreover she did not think Mrs. Mush's laugh either frank or real. "Something has happened, and Mrs. Mush knows of it," thought Sybil. A fact, slight in itself, confirmed this suspicion.

Now and then Mrs. Mush received an Irish paper. At first she lent this paper to Sybil, but suddenly she ceased doing so. When Sybil asked to borrow it, Mrs. Mush coolly replied,

"My dear, newspapers are not meant for young ladies."

Now this answer would have been in character if it had been uttered by Miss Glyn, a pattern of decorum, but it did not sound true when coming from Mrs. Mush, who, in her free and easy way, was wont to declare "that propriety had been invented by the improper people," and Sybil was incredulous. Nay more, she concluded that there was something in the newspaper which seriously affected her father's interests or prospects, and which he, out of his great love and kindness, wished to keep from her. And therefore, hearing Mrs. Mush's equivocal replies, and seeing her equivocal attitude, the poor child's fears were all confirmed, and her heart beat with that nameless terror of the unknown evil, which is harder to bear than the certain and clearly seen calamity. She applied to Mrs. Mush for comfort; but Mrs. Mush had none to give her, for she flatly denied the reality of Sybil's troubles, and preserved the most obstinate cheerfulness.

"Nonsense, my dear," she said to her one afternoon that Sybil came up to her room to inform her she was wretched, and that she was sure, she

was, Mr. Smith had inflicted some deadly wrong on her father—"nonsense. Do you want to get yourself into a low fever by the time Mr. Kennedy comes back?"

"I cannot help it, Mrs. Mush, I cannot be like you," almost austerely replied Sybil. "I do believe you are never dull," she added, reproachfully.

"Dull!" cried Mrs. Mush, with a joyous face, and a hearty, cheery laugh, that scouted the very idea. "I should think not! I like life too well to quarrel with it. I like it, and I enjoy it. Of all wretched imposters, suicides are the worst, in my eyes. A set of scape-graces, who run away into death. I never did like 'Mornings in Churchyards,' nor 'Old Mortality,' nor 'Gray's Elegy,' not I."

"Ah! but we must die!" sighed Sybil, with a wise shake of her young head.

"Just so. Therefore let us live. We are sure to die—let us live, I say. I think living a noble thing—a fine thing—and I take particular pleasure in it. I like the waking and being alive, the eating and drinking—there, you are shocked—young ladies neither eat nor drink, and being

alive, the walking and being alive; and I like the sleeping and the dreaming too. In short, it is a glorious invention!"

"Oh! I feel so too sometimes," said Sybil, gravely; "but you know, Mrs. Mush, life is full of disappointments."

"Wait till you are forty-five, my dear, and then you will like it rather better than you do now," gaily said Mrs. Mush.

Forty-five! Sybil's open countenance declared she could form no conception of so remote a period of life.

"You see, my dear," kindly continued Mrs. Mush, "happiness is no abstract, unchanging truth. What would make you happy now, might make you wretched ten years hence. Youth is made to wish and dream, and life to deny youth's dream and wishes. And thank God that it is so, else what a world of unquietness and passion and restlessness would this be. You say I am never dull—I will add that I am happy; but when I was seventeen, how I would have scorned my present happiness, how I would have annihilated it if I could! Truly I may bless Providence that I was denied my will at that early season, and compelled

to follow a road I hated—no pleasant one, my dear, but a path full of briars, and where many a time I stopped footsore and bleeding."

"Oh! do tell me all about it, Mrs. Mush," cried Sybil, who had heard that Mrs. Mush had had a love-story, and been compelled to marry a man she did not like.

"No, my dear, it would do you no good. Second-hand experience avails naught. Besides, I disapprove of making young things sad and wise before their time. You have a tendency that way I do not like at all. You are always poring over books—*I* never read."

"Never, Mrs. Mush?"

"I never read books—no, thank Heaven! What are books?—words. Well, I can have words without books. Besides, what is there to read?—poetry, novels, ethics, history, &c. My dear, I have poetry when I open my window; a novel when I watch a flirtation; philosophy when I sit in my chair and muse; and history when I take up the newspaper. The newspaper, my dear, is simply the modern epic; there is everything in it—murder, love, revenge, treason too, and high and low life. Oh! I like it amazingly."

"The newspaper is all about murders and accidents," pettishly said Sybil.

"Well, I do not like accidents," replied Mrs. Mush; "there is no meaning in them; but," she added, confidentially, "I dearly like a murder. Of course I do not wish for murders," she continued, in the tone of resigned virtue; "but when there is one, why, I like it. It is human nature. And then there is a thought that haunts me—it is of the murderer, whose hand is free from guilt, and has never had, and will never have, but might have the red stain. Oh! you may open your eyes till they grow round again with amazement. It is all very well for you to shudder with horror because that man has committed a murder. *I* shudder to think how many there are around me who would murder if they could, or if they were tempted. That unknown world which each man bears within him is a terrible thing, let me tell you. To think that if this affectionate papa had a little money less, he would turn wild and drown his children, as we drown kittens, because they are in the way; or to imagine yon henpecked husband jealous as an Othello, and as pitiless. I tell you, child, there is a terrible philosophy in it."

Sybil began to feel nervous and uncomfortable at Mrs. Mush's language. Moreover, that lady's fluency produced its usual effect—it overpowered her. Mrs. Mush was not one of those pitiless talkers who strangle their neighbour's speech in its very birth; but, as Miss Glyn said, "she circumvented you." And so she did; she had something to say on every topic, and you could not start one, but Mrs. Mush was ready to take hold of it and ride her hobby, dragging you after her through thick and thin. The philosophic country she was now traversing was dreary in the extreme to Sybil. She took no pleasure in possible murderers, and shuddered at the mere suggestion. Besides, she wanted comfort, and this was anything but consolatory. So with a sigh she said,

"I think I shall go and air papa's room; perhaps he may come to-night, you know."

"Ay, do, my dear."

Sybil went; but she felt nervous and unhappy. Suppose Mr. Smith were one of those possible murderers Mrs. Mush had suggested, and suppose her father had been made away with by that vulgar man with the sullen black eyes. Her heart so sickened at the thought, that she could not

endure to remain in Mr. Kennedy's room—she left it precipitately, and went back to Mrs. Mush's; but the room was empty, and Sybil heard Mrs. Mush talking to Narcisse in the garden. Her heart beat, a sudden temptation came over her. She looked round eagerly—one of Mrs. Mush's Irish papers lay on the chair. Sybil did not pause to think about the right or wrong of her actions; with a trembling hand, and a sense of guilt and disobedience, she seized the *Moonagh Herald*, and glanced eagerly over its columns. Her heart gave a great throb as in the very midst of a leader she read these words: "The evidence of Mr. James Kennedy is significant, though mysterious. We feel sure, indeed, that the unfortunate Mr. Dermot—" Sybil read no more, for Mrs. Mush, who now came in, took the paper out of her hand.

"So you do like the newspapers after all?" said the elder lady.

Their eyes met—eager and searching on one side, cool and guarded on the other.

"Mrs. Mush!" cried Sybil, too much agitated to feel confused at being thus detected, "what is it?—tell me!—what can it be?"

"My dear, what can you mean?" composedly asked Mrs. Mush.

"You know," excitedly said Sybil, "there is something dreadful about that Mr. Smith and my father. I am sure that Mr. Smith is a thief, who has been victimizing papa and that poor Mr. Dermot."

"There, there," soothingly said Mrs. Mush.

"A thief, if he is not worse," pursued Sybil; "why did the newspaper say the 'unfortunate Mr. Dermot?'"

"Pussy, pussy," said a cheery voice in the garden below.

Sybil flew to the window, and saw her father's handsome face looking up at her from below. In a moment she was out of the room, down the stairs, and in his arms, hugging him with all her might, and scarcely able to speak for joy.

CHAPTER V.

"OH! why did you not write?" she cried; "now confess, it was that horrid Mr. Smith would not let you."

"Poor Mr. Smith," gaily said Mr. Kennedy; "why, his last words were, 'His respects to miss.'"

"Pity there was no letter H to leave out," saucily said Sybil; "what was it he did to Mr. Dermot?"

Mr. Kennedy's face assumed a vacant expression.

"Dermid!" he repeated, "what Dermid?"

"Dermot—that Mr. Dermot he was raving about."

Mr. Kennedy laughed.

"Ask him when he comes here," he said, "I dare say he will tell you."

Sybil's face fell.

"Then he is coming again?" she said.

Mr. Kennedy did not answer this.

"How has she behaved, Mrs. Mush?" he asked, addressing that lady, who now joined them.

"She has fretted, Mr. Kennedy."

"Has she?" and Mr. Kennedy looked down at Sybil with a fondness which might ever be in his heart, but was not always in his looks. He seemed unusually tender of his little daughter this afternoon. She kept close to him, as if she feared he would escape her again, and he let her lock her arms within his, and hang upon him without demur.

"But how did you come home?" suddenly asked Sybil, struck with the fact that her father seemed to have dropped from the clouds; "not on foot, of course?"

"Why not?" playfully asked Mr. Kennedy; "in the novels I read when I was a boy, the hero was always on foot. Sometimes he carried a knapsack. I do not, which is an improvement, you see."

Sybil saw that her father had come on foot on purpose, and that he was not be questioned concerning the spot where he had been all the time he was away.

This might be the case, or it might not, for during dinner-time Mr. Kennedy informed the ladies that he had been visiting the south of France.

"With Mr. Smith?" said Sybil.

"Pussy, you think too much of Mr. Smith. If he but knew it he would grow quite vain. No, I was not with Mr. Smith, who went off to England, I believe, but I shall not fail telling him, when I write, how much he is in your thoughts."

Sybil pouted and tossed her head, but her father drew her on his knee, and pacified her with a kiss.

Dinner was over. Mr. Kennedy was in excellent spirits. This seemed the proper time for preferring a request that lay at Sybil's heart. So, in her most persuasive accents, she said,

"Dear Blanche is so unhappy at the school. I had a letter from her the day you left. It made me so angry."

"What! angry with your angelic friend?"

"Oh!" cried Sybil, amazed at the suggestion, "no, but with Miss Blunt, who is *so* ill-natured."

"No rebellion, Pussy. The angelic Blanche does not state the case fairly, I'll be bound."

"Indeed, she does—and I can ask her to come and see me, can I not?" added Sybil.

"No," almost sharply replied her father, and, putting her down, he rose and left the room.

Sybil felt much inclined to cry.

"Oh! Mrs. Mush," she cried, "I am miserable!"

"What! with your father home safe and sound!"

"Why, yes, I ought to be happy, I know, but I do love Blanche," said Sybil, with tears in her eyes; "and everyone is against her, even papa, who has never seen her. I do believe I shall never see her again, and I have not even her photograph."

"Oh! to be sure, there would be comfort in that."

"I wish I knew how to paint!" continued Sybil with a sigh.

"And so you do, you little goose!"

"Indeed no, Mrs. Mush."

"My dear, we are all painters, though sometimes we do not know it. I tell you we paint daily, from morning till night. We are landscape painters and historical painters, from Adam and Eve in the garden, down to the account of the

last battle. Why, we cannot hear a thing mentioned, but we paint it straight. Conceive, if you can, a world without images—a void awful as space, still as death. Why, even that is an image —Milton's chaos. Why, I could not live a human life, if I had not that medium between myself and the outer world. So I am a painter, and you are a painter too."

"Well," confidentially said Sybil, "I do see her face, when I shut my eyes, so. Oh! I see it now quite plain, Mrs. Mush."

"Of course you do, and the dimple in her chin, and the wave in her hair."

"Ah! you are quizzing me now; and I am so unhappy! I think I shall go and write to her."

"Do, my dear, it will be miserable, but you will like it."

Sybil went up to her room; but as she passed the door of the room she had destined to her friend, she could not resist the temptation of entering it. It was a low large room, furnished in a heavy style, that gave it a sober and quiet look. Its two deep windows, around which a vine hung outside in green festoons, let in but little light, and that little was absorbed by the gloomy furni-

ture. Green damask curtains fell from the ceiling to the floor in massive folds around the lofty bed, hence the room had received its name.

It was a melancholy apartment enough, but it was more romantic than the other rooms, and Sybil had decreed that it should be Blanche's. It was also a corner room, and either of its two windows afforded a different prospect.

"She will like this," thought Sybil, going to one, and opening it to lean out on the wide stone ledge; "for she must come—she must!"

Her eye wandered with admiration over the broad expanse of country, ending in a cloudy horizon. It was a vast and melancholy landscape, but it was very fine in the glow of the setting sun.

"Blanche will dream here," thought Sybil, "and she will work here."

She opened the other window, and looked down at the small old-fashioned garden, whence the scent of roses and mignonette rose very sweetly on the air.

"I shall lend her Dicky," thought Sybil. "She can hang his cage here; but as she does not like the trouble of birds, I shall come and feed Dicky

myself every morning. Poor old Dicky! I wonder if he will like it!"

This was a very doubtful question, and whilst Sybil was turning it over, her father pushed open the door, and entered the room unheard, startling her with a "Pussy" in her ear, and a hand laid upon her shoulder.

Sybil looked round with a smile, which another smile on his handsome face answered kindly.

"What are you doing here?" he asked—"dreaming as usual, Pussy?"

Pussy nodded.

"Well, little housekeeper, I want you to get this room ready for to-night."

"Blanche is coming!" cried Sybil.

"Blanche! I tell you, child, I do not want that young lady."

"But it is Blanche's room," saucily said Sybil. "I have given it to her."

Mr. Kennedy laughed.

"The peerless Blanche must do without it, Pussy. I want the Green Room for your Uncle Edward."

Sybil raised to her father's face a look of much amazement. Never before that day had she heard

of the existence of her Uncle Edward. When she had questioned her father about his family, he had ever replied, half in earnest, half in jest,

"I am a mushroom, Pussy; and you know how mushrooms grow—anywhere and anyhow."

Miss Glyn had not been more communicative. She had spoken of the Glyns, their ancient descent and former greatness, but concerning the Kennedys she had been mute; and Mrs. Mush, when questioned, had wandered into a philosophic flight, and Sybil's inner conclusion had been that her father was a foundling, and had no family at all. Great, therefore, was her surprise to hear of the existence of this new brother. She longed to question, but did not dare to do so. Mr. Kennedy was a kind and indulgent father; his manners, his countenance, were genial and open; he looked frank amongst men; but for all that few people knew what James Kennedy felt, thought, or did. Thus, though Pussy was an indulged and tenderly-loved daughter, she now hesitatingly ventured on a timid,

"And must your brother, my uncle, have this room?"

"Yes, Pussy, he must."

"Papa," more daringly said Sybil, "what is my uncle Edward like?"

"You will see him this evening, child," he carelessly replied.

"But you might tell me something about him; if you stimulate my curiosity, I shall go wild, and be obliged to ask my new uncle all about himself, and that will be awkward, will it not?"

Mr. Kennedy laughed, and pinched his daughter's cheek, but he allowed her curiosity to remain unsatisfied, for he walked out of the room without a word. Sybil felt half wild with curiosity, and at once ran up to Mrs. Mush. She entered that lady's room in a breathless state, and exclaimed, in her quick, impulsive way,

"Mrs. Mush, what shall *I* do?"

"I do not at all know, my dear," answered Mrs. Mush, airily; "you may be going up in a balloon, for all I can tell."

"Oh! dear, Mrs. Mush, do not be quizzing me."

"My love, I am not quizzing, but you look fit for a pair of wings. And a very pretty little Psyche you would make, let me tell you."

Sybil blushed, and as she dearly liked admira-

tion, and as Mrs. Mush evidently admired her just then, she gave that lady a gracious and benignant look, then resumed, more sedately:

"Mrs. Mush, there is an uncle of mine coming to-night, and I never heard about him before the last ten minutes."

"Did you not?"

"No—never. Did you?"

Mrs. Mush paused before she answered.

"My love, I have a wretched memory."

"I am quite bewildered," continued Sybil; "it seems incredible to find out new relations so. I had no suspicion of it, and lo and behold, there is an uncle!"

"Well, my dear, make much of him when you get him. Relations are another beautiful invention—the result of marriage, and that is a living miracle in my eyes. Who ever dreamed of two people living together, unless they are man and wife, or related by blood? Friendship is all very fine, but there must be blood."

"But he is quite a stranger to me," argued Sybil, unable to lose this view of the question. "I cannot think of him as an uncle, and I did hope you would give me some account of him."

"My dear, no one knows much of your father's family. He came and married my cousin, but he was like a romantic bridegroom in a ballad—he came all alone, and I will add that he was not fond of answering questions concerning his pedigree."

"And he is to have Blanche's room!" indignantly said Sybil.

"Oh! dear, that is very bad."

"But he shall not have Dicky."

"That will be a severe punishment indeed!"

"Mrs. Mush, I shall dislike him."

Mrs. Mush had no doubt about it; this unexpected agreement soothed Sybil's feelings considerably, and she had the Green Room prepared for her uncle with tolerable equanimity. She was even lively and cheerful, and if the truth must be told, extremely inquisitive and anxious when night came on. But after being vexed at his existence, Sybil was doomed to be vexed at her uncle's non-appearance. The whole family sat up till twelve in vain—Mr. Kennedy's brother did not come.

"I shall sit up," said Mr. Kennedy, "but you may go to bed, Pussy."

Pussy obeyed, but she slept indifferently that night. Every hour she kept starting up, thinking she heard a loud knock at the gate, and even a strange step firm and strong up the staircase.

"Has uncle arrived?" cried Sybil, when she met her father the next morning.

"No," he coldly replied; and as he turned away, Sybil saw that he looked harrassed and worn.

She felt amazed. She thought, she hoped that her uncle would arrive in the course of the day, and relieve her father from his anxiety—but he did not; nor did he come the next day, nor the next either.

Sybil got vexed and annoyed. The constant expectation worked her up into a fever. To her father she could not speak, for he would not tolerate the subject; and Mrs. Mush had no comfort to give her.

"My dear," she said gaily, "there are beings whose existence is confined to our imagination. It is there they have a local habitation and a name. James Kennedy may have dreamed he had a brother, or he may have dreamed he spoke to you about such a person. I believe there is a philo-

sophic system according to which there is no such thing as substance, but everything lies in appearance. Who knows but this invisible uncle of yours may be part and parcel of that philosophy?"

Now, there was something in this speech, or, rather, in the tone and look with which it was uttered, that struck Sybil. However paradoxical Mrs. Mush's flights might be, she had an Irish vehemence of manner that bore with it the conviction of her earnestness. She might not think five minutes later, as she thought then; but whilst she spoke, it was her real sentiments that she uttered. Now it seemed to Sybil that these fantastic remarks about her Uncle Edward's forming part of this unsubstantial philosophy, were uttered rather to say something, than because Mrs. Mush had anything to say.

"Mrs. Mush," she said, very earnestly, "have you not been struck with papa's looks these last few days?"

"How so?" slowly asked Mrs. Mush.

"I mean with his angry looks, Mrs. Mush. I am afraid he has lost money. And I do believe that Mr. Smith is at the bottom of it."

"Do you think so?" slowly said Mrs. Mush, and

she gazed out of the window on the green landscape and blue sky, and stood thus apparently in deep abstraction; but it seemed to Sybil especially for the purpose that their looks should not meet.

Sybil's heart began to beat. Ever since he had spoken of her uncle's coming, her father had been an altered man. He had been restless, anxious, and irritable. There had been a change too over Mrs. Mush, and, as it seemed to Sybil, a secret quarrel between that lady and her father. Moreover, whenever Sybil attacked the absent Mr. Smith, and laid any blame to him, Mrs. Mush took his part. And, indeed, Sybil's fancies, when they took that direction, were of the strangest kind.

"Mrs. Mush," she said to her one morning, just after the postman had brought in a packet of letters, which made her father look very grave, "I know why my Uncle Edward does not come—he stays to watch Mr. Smith."

"To watch Mr. Smith, indeed!" said Mrs. Mush, in rather an odd tone; "why, your uncle is coming to-night."

Sybil looked incredulous.

"Mrs. Mush," she said, "I do not believe it;

besides, I am tired of telling Denise to make his bed."

"My dear, Denise must make it once more. Mr. Kennedy will have him in the Green Room, though mine would do very well. Ah! I forgot to tell you that I am going away to-day. Mrs. Steele wants me."

"You are going away, and Mrs. Steele wants you!" exclaimed Sybil, all amazed; "and who is Mrs. Steele?"

"My dear, you have heard me mention her again and again; but I suppose you mean, what is she like? Well, my dear, Mrs. Steele is like her house, and her house is like her. It is large and sensible, and everything in it is substantial, precise, and good. Her clocks go as well as the sun; and Mrs. Steele thinks, though she does not say so, that they go rather better. Then she is such a woman for intellect and logic. The last time I called I found her catechising Sarah the housemaid on her most imprudent flirtation with the footman. 'Now let us argue like rational beings,' she said—it was quite beautiful to hear her."

"But, Mrs. Mush, what does she want you for?"

"My dear, I will tell you in strict confidence—Mrs. Steele wants to improve *me*! Mrs. Steele has improved all her acquaintances, and has no one left to keep her hand in. She has a daughter, to be sure, but who would think of improving Adelina Steele? She is a most admirable young woman. She is so benevolent, that she belongs to the Flannel Petticoat Society, and so modest that she suppresses the word petticoat. Her manners have the polish of marble and the temperature of ice. Then her profile is Grecian, and cannot be matched out of the Vatican. In short, it is quite beautiful to sit and look at her sideways."

Tears rushed to Sybil's eyes.

"And so," she said, "you leave me here alone with my father and my new uncle, and that for people whom you laugh at, Mrs. Mush."

"Child, do not blame me," said Mrs. Mush, with a complete change of manner, and speaking with some bitterness of look and accent; "your father asked me here, and gave me to understand that this was to be a visit, not of days, or of months, but of years—and now he bids me go, and go I must. I could only interfere, and I must be off, and begin the old life of wandering."

Sybil turned scarlet.

"Is it on account of my uncle that you must go?" she exclaimed.

Mrs. Mush was silent.

"Then I shall hate him!" cried Sybil excitedly.

"My dear, do not; your uncle is blameless, and Mr. Kennedy's conduct is justified by circumstances over which he has no control; but I am the victim, as the poor always are," added Mrs. Mush, resuming her philosophic tone; "and now, suppose you let me pack up."

"Can I help you?" asked Sybil, rather disconsolately.

"No, my dear, thank you. You had better go and see that your uncle's room is aired properly."

"It has been aired this fortnight," said Sybil impatiently; but she went, not, indeed, to see her uncle's room aired, but to take a walk in the garden.

Past the sun-dial, up the steps went Sybil, into the wilderness above, which Mr. Kennedy had had the good taste not to improve. The morning was lovely; the wild rose, the honeysuckle blossomed on every hedge. A pleasant hum of insects filled

the fragrant air, the trees shivered in the sun, and the faint roar of the sea was like music to the ear. But Sybil sat down, and felt unhappy. Something was altered in Saint Vincent since the foolish days when she found it such a dreary old house. Nothing had been the same since Mr. Smith's coming. He had spoiled all—the peace and beauty of the house, the happiness of its tenants. He had banished her aunt Miss Glyn, he had taken away her father, he had made Mrs. Mush mysterious and strange. And she was sure that he was at the bottom of her present trouble. It was Mr. Smith who delayed her uncle's coming, who rendered her father irritable, and who caused Mrs. Mush's sudden departure.

"But I must say that my new uncle abets him," thought Sybil resentfully, "and I know I shall hate him, too."

In this mood she bade Mrs. Mush farewell, and saw her leave the abbey. As they embraced, Mrs. Mush said in a low, pitying tone, "Poor child!"

"What did Mrs. Mush say?" sharply asked her father.

Sybil, her tearful eyes fastened on the carriage that was rapidly driving away, told him.

"Let Mrs. Mush keep her pity," he scornfully said; "you want none, Pussy."

"I feel very miserable," candidly said Sybil, "if I had even dear Blanche——"

"Nonsense," he interrupted, "your uncle is coming, and he is worth Mrs. Mush and Miss Cains to boot."

Sybil reddened indignantly, and she thought,

"Mr. Smith sent away poor Aunt Glyn, and my new uncle sends away Mrs. Mush—I know I shall hate him!"

CHAPTER VI.

RESOLVED though she was to hate her uncle, Sybil none the less did her best to make him comfortable. Once more Denise was summoned to the Green Room, and over this slow deputy Sybil now stood, whilst the room was being prepared for its tenant.

Denise was never in a hurry, and as there really was little or nothing to do, she every now and then rested from her labour; whilst her young mistress, who took but little pleasure in the task of looking on, vainly tried to stimulate her, with an imploring—

"Now, Denise, do get on!"

But slowness in all its forms was one of the attributes of Denise.

"La!" she would often say, "where's the use of being in a hurry? One is sure to get on all the same."

Thanks to this satisfactory axiom, Denise proved to herself that speed was needless, and never used it, howsoever great the pressure upon her might be.

"There is plenty of time, mademoiselle," she said. "The train comes in at six, and mademoiselle may be sure the gentlemen will not come to-day. People never do come on the right day."

"I tell you, Denise, that whether my uncle comes or not, the room must be ready."

Denise paused in the act of making the bed.

"Is he old?" she asked.

"What about it, Denise?"

"Because if he is old, we must put an extra pillow to prop him up; and if he is not, one pillow will do."

"Denise, you will drive me crazy! Put the pillow. He is sure to be old. Uncles always are old."

"I don't know that, mademoiselle. My brother's wife has an uncle two years younger than she is."

"Denise!" entreated Sybil.

"Yes, mademoiselle."

"Make the bed."

"I am making the bed."

"No, Denise, you are standing still, staring at me.'

"Mademoiselle has such white hands, and such pretty fingers," admiringly said Denise.

A sound of voices below checked Sybil's impatient reply to this complimentary remark. She looked out of the window into the garden. She saw her father walking from beneath an arched gallery of trellis-work, covered with a heavy vine, and behind him on that background of green gloom suddenly appeared the figure of a stranger clear and sunlit. He was a man of thirty, tall and strongly built. He was handsome, too, though he had heavy hair of a tawny hue, more remarkable than becoming, and his broad forehead, and heavy eyebrows, which shaded large, deep-set eyes, and, above all, his square chin, and pale, firm lips, struck Sybil as formidable in their way. She felt, as she looked, that a strong nature, mental and physical, stood before her; and she felt it as she saw it rapidly, for as he walked by her father's side the stranger suddenly looked up and perceived her. He smiled at her blooming face

looking down at him from the vine-leaves, but had time to do no more.

When he turned to Mr. Kennedy with a questioning look, Sybil withdrew quickly, and turned to Denise with flushed face.

"I am sure that is my uncle below," she said. "You need put but one pillow, Denise."

"Then he is young?" ejaculated Denise, going to the window.

"You need not look at him," said Sybil, shutting the window deliberately. "Go on with the room, Denise."

Denise obeyed, and her young mistress waited till the task was done; then saw her out, closed the door, and for awhile stood in doubt. Should she go down, or wait till she was summoned. Her father's voice decided the question.

"Pussy, come down," he said.

Thus called, Sybil obeyed. She found them both waiting for her just outside the house in the garden. She came towards them half shy, half daring.

"Can't you look at your uncle, Pussy?" gaily asked her father.

Sybil looked up. Mr. Kennedy passed his arm

around her waist, and with the hand that was free he raised her blooming face, so that it should meet the gaze of his brother's deep-set but brilliant grey eyes.

"She is not amiss'" he said.

An approving nod implied, "Certainly not."

"And clever and good."

"I believe it," said the polite uncle.

"And she is a rich girl, Ned."

Ned smiled.

"She can sing like a lark, and frisk like a kitten, and dance like a fairy, and do everything save talk sense."

Sybil's pretty lip pouted, but her father only pinched her cheek, and said carelessly,

"Never mind, child; Edward would have found *that* out very soon."

"I am sure, Mr. Kennedy," began Sybil.

Her father interrupted her rather shortly.

"Uncle Edward, Pussy," he corrected, "I am Mr. Kennedy, and we can't have two. And now, talk sense to him if you can, and keep him company, for I am going off to Saint Vincent, and will not be back till night. You must both dine without me."

Sybil looked so dismayed at the duties thus laid upon her, that her uncle laughed, and said gaily,

"Never mind, my dear, I shall keep *you* company."

His voice was rich, warm, and pleasant. A genial voice, that matched with his merry bright eyes. Sybil looked at him, and liked him, and when Mr. Kennedy walked away saying, "Don't spoil her, Ned," she glanced up rather saucily in her uncle's face, as if to see how much inclination to spoil her she might find there. His downward look was very kind. Indeed Sybil's face was one most people liked to look at, and her new uncle proved no exception to the general rule. Sybil thought he was searching for a likeness Miss Glyn had often mentioned.

"I am like my mother, am I not?" she said.

"My dear, I never saw her. I was far away when you were born."

"You have travelled much, uncle?"

"A great deal."

"But where?"

"Everywhere."

"Did you come by the train, uncle?"

"My dear, you saw me coming through the garden. The station does not lie in that direction, does it?"

Sybil felt she had questioned enough, and looked at him doubtfully. She had relied on that good-humoured easy face of his, for having it all her own way with her new uncle, but, looking at him more attentively, she saw lines of will—stubborn lines, she called them, which warned her not to depend too much on her first impression.

She asked a little timidly if her uncle wished for an early dinner; and he having very promptly replied that it would be highly acceptable, she left him to see about it. She saw about herself too. She perceived that her uncle had begun by admiring her, and as he had begun, Sybil wished him to continue. When they met at dinner, his complacent looks showed her that she had been successful. Everything about him said, "You are very pretty, and I like you."

Sybil, too, liked her new relative. He was handsome, genial, and good-humoured. He had a frank, open look which, though it could become dangerously keen and piercing, attracted her irresistibly. There was strength, too, in him, strength

intellectual and physical, which conquered Sybil; and then he was delightful company, and did his best to please and amuse her.

"He is very unlike papa," thought Sybil, "and not so handsome; but he is a dear old uncle, and I like him amazingly."

She wanted to leave him when dinner was over, but Uncle Edward completed his conquest by declining to sit alone over his wine, and preferring the garden and her society. They walked out of the dining-room, took a few turns up and down one of the gravelled paths, then came back to the house. On one side of the door stood a broad stone bench.

"Let us sit down," said Uncle Edward.

So he sat at one end of the bench, and Sybil sat at the other, and looked at him demurely.

"Now, my dear," he said coolly, "I am going to remain in Saint Vincent for some time, and as in acquaintance, as in everything, the beginning is all in all, I beg that you will treat me at once like a real old uncle, who is determined to pet, spoil, and even scold you, if need be."

"Everyone scolds me," rather indignantly said Sybil—"even Blanche."

"Blanche!—have you got a sister?"

"No; Blanche, Miss Cains, is my friend, and the best, the noblest, the dearest creature—oh! she is *so* good!" she added, ardently.

Her eyes sparkled as she launched on her favourite topic. Uncle Edward watched her, and seemed amused.

"So good, is she?" he ejaculated, leaning back in his corner of the bench, "then I should not like her—goodness is insipid."

"Ah! not goodness like hers. She has plenty of spirit."

"I do not like spirited women—they have such a temper."

"But Blanche has no temper," a little warmly said Sybil, "or, rather, she has a beautiful temper —so sweet!"

"You think so; depend upon it that sweetness is all put on."

"Indeed it is not. Blanche has the face, and the heart, and the nature of an angel."

"The heart of an angel—why, my dear, what can you know about the heart of an angel?"

There was truth in the remark, and Sybil was vexed to have said a foolish thing.

"I do not know why everyone is against poor Blanche," she said, indignantly. "It was just the same at school. Emma said her hair was not her own—now I am sure it is."

"Do not be too sure. I daresay she puts on her golden curls, true angelic colour, as she puts on the sweetness, &c."

Sybil knew her uncle only meant to teaze her, but affection is sensitive, and she was so vexed with his remarks, that she felt her growing liking for this new relative considerably chilled. He saw her grave, displeased face, and smiled.

"I do believe you are a good child," he said—"a good, affectionate little creature, and I am sure we shall get on beautifully together."

Sybil did not feel so sure of that, but tried, nevertheless, to look more gracious, and as she looked she soon felt.

This new uncle's manner, both direct and genial, acted as a kind of "sesame" with most people. Few could resist the mixture of frankness and good-humour which his countenance expressed, and an inexperienced girl like Sybil, unaccustomed to society, had no fund of coldness or reserve to fall back upon. Indeed, she did not think of it.

Her uncle seemed to her a most agreeable companion. He was quite as clever as Mrs. Mush, and to Sybil he appeared more kind. The truth was, Uncle Edward was a good deal younger than Sybil's cousin, and the young dearly like the young, though, to be sure, Uncle Edward was only young by comparison. Nevertheless, Sybil's whole heart opened to him. She talked, she laughed, and was as much at her ease as if she had known him years. Uncle Edward liked all this; he liked the garden, too, and that mild evening, that spoke of coming summer; but something was wanting to complete his happiness, so he took out a cigar.

"Ah! you smoke," she said, reproachfully.

"My dear, I beg your pardon. I shall walk away, and come back in an hour or so."

He rose, and Sybil looked blank.

"You are going to leave me," she said, dolefully —"pray don't go."

It was Uncle Edward's turn to look doleful, for if Sybil was charming, a cigar was delightful.

"Oh! you may smoke all the same," she said, resignedly—"I am used to it. Papa smokes."

"You little cheat!—I thought it made your head ache."

"Well, but it is a terribly bad habit, uncle."

"So says your charming sex, because it knows not the virtues of tobacco. Do I feel in a bad temper, I take a cigar, and smoke my ruffled temper down. Do I want a new train of thought, I light my cigar, and it comes. Do I feel in need of society, my cigar keeps me company. In short, tobacco is soothing, thoughtful, and sociable."

"Then why don't girls smoke?" tartly asked Sybil.

"Because it would interfere with their eloquence. Don't look at me. The remark is none of mine. It was uttered by a cynical philosopher a long time ago."

"What was his name?" indignantly asked Sybil.

"I have forgotten it; but I daresay he lived in a tub, and was quite beneath your notice. And now, what have you been reading to-day? Your father says you are a great reader."

"I have been reading Livy."

"Livy!—who is that?"

If Sybil could have seen Uncle Edward, she

might have detected a merry twinkle in his gray eye; but the evening was growing dark, and she had no thought of mischief, so secretly compassionating his ignorance, she said kindly,

"Why, he was a Roman historian, uncle, and I have been reading his account of Virginia's death, and it is grand."

"Indeed!"

He seemed interested; and Sybil, still anxious to improve him, went on.

"A bad man, a Decemvir, wanted to make a slave of her, and her father, Virginius, saved her by killing her."

"That was a sharp remedy."

"Not too sharp," cried Sybil, eagerly. "I mean, it was better to die than to be Claudius's slave. Besides, Virginius was not a Christian."

"Which saves all."

"At least, it justifies him. He snatched up a knife in the Forum and killed her—and he did well!"

"You little Heathen!"

"Ah! if I could see the Forum!" continued Sybil, without heeding him; "if I could only see it!"

"Will a view in the stereoscope do you, Sybil? I have brought you one."

"You have got the Forum!" she cried, her eyes sparkling.

"Come in and see."

They went into the dining-room. Uncle Edward rang, asked Denise for a light, and for a black square box on the table in his room. She presently returned with it. Uncle Edward adjusted the view, and having handed the instrument to Sybil, he sat down, leaned back in his chair, and watched her. Sybil looked long and eagerly. She saw a few tall shattered columns rising on the sky. An arch stood in the distance, and grass-grown ruins lay in the foreground. Her heart beat, her cheek flushed This was the Forum; but where was the Decemvir sitting in state?—where were the lictors?—where was the vast surging crowd that saw Virginia die, and rose to avenge her?

"Why, this is a desert," she said, with an impatient sigh.

"Not quite; but even though it were! The desert is the great master, Sybil. Where it has been once it will be again. I read the other day

that a shady forest grew behind Westminster Abbey once on a time. Well, ages hence a forest will grow there again, I have no doubt. Mighty oaks will flourish in Poet's Corner, and birds sing on their boughs and build nests there, and the dust of heroes will nourish the roots of elm and beech—and where's the harm, Sybil?"

"Yes; but this is not the right Forum—not the one I imagined."

"My dear, the names of ruins are the best part of their beauty. See, this is the Via Sacra, somewhere there beyond Romulus and Remus were found. That arch was raised by Titus, after the siege of Jerusalem; and near these columns Curtius leaped into the yawning pit."

"You have seen the Forum!" cried Sybil, looking eagerly at the eyes which had beheld the most famous places of ancient story.

"I have. And that Forum where Roman met Roman, I found almost as silent as the glass representation on your lap. I have also seen the Colosseum where the barbarian fought and died, whilst Cæsar and the six vestal virgins, and, indeed, all Rome, looked on—it was such a dainty sight. Moreover, I have seen the crumbling

ruins of palaces, and the great desert of the Campagna, and long lines of ancient tombs by the *Via Appia*, &c. &c."

Sybil clasped her hands and envied him. But he shook his heavy hair and laughed.

"So you too are a Roman," he said; "well, so was I once. But how I have learned to hate that greedy old Heathen, Rome, since then. Well, it is no use arguing with you—you think me a rank heretic, and you are a Roman lady. But pray where is the long slender stole, with its broad girdle and its hem of purple and gold. Have you any of that *opus Phrygianum* supposed to have been point lace? Do you keep your hands cool with an amber ball, and your neck with a live serpent? No, I miss the veil, and the ample palla too—my dear, I am afraid you are no Roman after all."

"Do you think Virginia was dressed so?" cried Sybil, all eagerness.

"Well, no; I am talking of an Imperial, not a Republican lady."

"You are very learned," said Sybil; "and I see you have read Livy, and that you have been drawing me out—it is too bad, uncle."

"So it is," he replied candidly; "but you see I like it."

He stretched out his hand and smoothed her hair. Sybil shook her head impatiently.

"Ah! but I like that too," he remonstrated. "You are like a nice little kitten, you see—it is pleasant to stroke you."

Sybil drew herself up indignantly, and moved her chair away; but Uncle Edward soon coaxed her back.

"What else have you been reading to-day?" he asked kindly. "You'll not tell me—but you must—else how are we to get on?—people's books are to me as good as people's minds."

"Well, then, what have *you* been reading, uncle?"

"My dear, as I came in the railway I read one of the saddest books that ever were written—'Don Quixote.'"

"Sad!—you call that sad!" cried Sybil, shaking her saucy curls. "I never take it up but I laugh till I am tired."

"Yes—youth is pitiless. And I, too, used to laugh at Don Quixote—beaten, mocked, ill-used, Don Quixote. Don Quixote, the great knight,

the gallant gentleman, the brave heart, and yet so gentle. But you were mad, Don Quixote—you were very mad indeed. You believed in chivalric honour; in ladies beautiful, virtuous and distressed; in knights, the flower of bravery, and the pink of courtesy. You went about seeking what wrongs you might redress—what weak ones you might protect—what strong giants of evil you might cut down. And you loved Dulcinea—fair, profaned image! You loved her purely, honourably. And as you were the finest gentleman, the noblest knight earth ever bore, a great genius told your story; and who can say whether he told it in sorrow or in scorn?"

Sybil looked puzzled, and tried to read her uncle's face; but it baffled her. There was something there beyond girlish acumen.

"Did you read any other book, uncle?" she asked wistfully.

He laughed a low, but hearty laugh.

"So you want to draw me out," he said gaily; "my dear little girl, you cannot do it. It is the privilege of my years and experience to read you; and it is the blessing of your years and ignorance that you cannot possibly read me. I am an old

bird—a hawk—or I could not pass through life; and you are, as yet, a little white dove, innocent and spotless. May you remain so very long, my dear—very long."

His look, his voice, were very kind. They more than atoned for the freedom of his remarks; besides, in neither could Sybil read contempt for her ignorance; and she was too quick and sensitive not to detect in both the respect and tenderness which a generous and manly nature ever feels for girlhood and innocence.

"How old are you?" he suddenly asked.

"Seventeen last April, uncle."

"Seventeen! Then fourteen years ago I saw you. You are rather altered, but you have kept that naughty little girl's dark eyes."

Sybil longed to question. Where had he been since then? How was it that his name had never been mentioned within her hearing? Words trembled on her lips, but she was spared the temptation of uttering them. The dining-room door opened, and Mr. Kennedy suddenly appeared, and said gaily,

"Well, Pussy, how much sense have you talked and how are you getting on with Uncle Edward?"

"Oh! so well," replied Sybil nodding.

They both laughed. But Sybil meant what she said.

"He is very delightful," she thought, as she went upstairs that night; and when, after a long fit of musing she went to bed, and fell asleep, she dreamed that her uncle was going to marry Blanche Cains, and that she, Sybil, acted as bridesmaid, and stood with them near the altar.

CHAPTER VII.

SYBIL'S dream did not seem as very likely to be fulfilled, for as her uncle entered the cloister the next morning he found her walking slowly along one of the galleries with an open letter in her hand, and tears in her eyes.

"My dear," he said kindly, "what is the matter? Tell me; perhaps I can assist you."

Sybil looked up in his face, and it was so kind that at once she told him her trouble.

"I have got a letter from my friend, and she asks me to get her a situation in a school, or in a family at Saint Vincent, and papa will not let me interfere; he will not even let me talk to Mrs. Ronald. He says I know nothing of the qualifications required for a teacher. But how is dear Blanche to get on if no one helps her? Uncle, what am I to do?"

He did not answer at once. He seemed both perplexed and concerned.

"Dear uncle," resumed Sybil, "I have got fifty francs—two pounds English—don't you think I can send it to Blanche? It is mine, you know, and she will not mind it from me. She knows I love her so much."

"No, Sybil; let me lend you some money. You can say you had it from a friend."

"No, no," interrupted Sybil. "It must be my money only, uncle. I cannot send it myself, and I shall be so grateful to you if you will do that for me."

"Well, your gratitude is worth something, Sybil, so I shall do this."

"I'll go and fetch it at once," cried Sybil.

"You can give it to me later."

"No—no, it must be my money."

"Must it?—well, then, go."

Sybil left him at once, and soon came back out of breath. Her eyes sparkled with joy as she handed him the gold pieces. He chinked them gaily, and said,

"Your little fortune, Sybil—shall I give you a receipt?"

"No, no, I'll trust you," saucily said Sybil; "but you'll send it to-day, will you not?"

"This very morning. What a pleasant old cloister this is, Sybil; I suppose you will let me smoke here?"

"Yes, uncle; but are you sure you will not forget sending the money?"

"There is not the least fear of my forgetting it. That cross is very fine; I like this old abbey."

"So should I, if Blanche were with me," sighed Sybil; "but I fear papa will never let me ask her, he has quite a prejudice against her."

"Perhaps he is jealous, my dear. You seem crazy about Miss——what is her name?"

"Cains."

"Cains! a formidable name."

"Cains, uncle; oh! she is so good, how you would admire her!"

Uncle Edward smiled a sceptical but not unkind smile. He liked this young girl's adoration for her friend; it was so fervent and unselfish.

"And how Blanche would admire him," thought Sybil; "I am afraid they will never meet. How delightful if they were to marry, and she were to become my aunt!"

There was something so peculiar in her look as she came to this conclusion, that he reddened a little, for he had still a good deal of that impulsive sensitiveness about him which calls up a blush, and said quickly,

"Well, what is it?"

It was Sybil's turn to colour.

"Nothing," she stammered; "but are you sure you will not forget the letter, uncle?"

"I daresay I must send it off at once, to please you."

"Ay, uncle—pray do."

"Well then, good-bye."

He nodded to her, and re-entered the house. Sybil remained in the cloister, pacing it up and down. It was very quiet, very pleasant with its roof of blue sky and its sunlit arcades, and Sybil felt gay and happy. She forgot the doubtful future which lay before poor Miss Cains. She only remembered that she had just sent her fifty francs; she was too young a housekeeper as yet to know that this sum could not go very far. It seemed a large one to Sybil, and she felt convinced it must assist Blanche materially. It would enable her to leave Miss Blunt and go on looking for an

engagement; and Blanche was so good and so clever and so fascinating, that she must end by getting an engagement—of course she must. In this happy mood Sybil walked up and down the cloister, and indeed remained the best part of the day. But just as post time had gone by, she remembered with dismay that her uncle had not taken Miss Cains's address. The two pounds were lost, and, worst of all, dear Blanche would not get them. She was in the library reading when the dismal conviction came to her. At once she threw down her book, and ran out to the garden where she had just caught a glimpse of her uncle. He turned round on hearing her quick footstep, and greeted her with a smile, but Sybil exclaimed dolefully,

"Oh! dear, uncle, I never gave you her direction."

Uncle Edward smiled and said,

"Miss Cains lives at the Greenery, Brompton."

"Oh, how do you know?"

"You held her letter so that I could not help seeing this much."

Sybil's face fell. Suppose he had also seen the first paragraph of Blanche Cains's letter—"And so

you are resolved not to like your uncle? Well, my dear, I have other troubles, and—"

"On my word," he emphatically observed, "I saw and read nothing else."

Sybil blushed at having so readily betrayed her dismay; but she was glad those keen grey eyes of his, which were keen though they were so kind, had not seen the words that concerned himself.

"For I do like him," she thought as she walked by his side, "I do like him, and I shall like him more, I know."

"It is gone—gone in your name, and Miss Cains will get it to-morrow evening," he resumed.

Sybil looked at him earnestly,

"Uncle," she said, "how quick and clever you are to have seen and remembered her direction. I wish you had been here with Mr. Smith."

He was silent awhile, then said slowly,

"Mr. Smith—who is Mr. Smith?"

"That is just it—who is he? I cannot make it out. He seems a low vulgar man, but sometimes I think he is not. I suppose he makes-believe. And then he went away so strangely. You would have found him out if you had been here. I do

believe Mrs. Mush knew all about him, but then she would not tell me."

"And you suppose that I would. I fancy you are accustomed to be humoured, Miss Sybil. I suspect that your own little pleasure is the law of your little life. It seems to be rather a butterfly existence that which you lead. Out early and late in the garden, leaning on window-sills dreaming away through the twilight, and so on—eh?"

Sybil looked at him a little surprised. Was her new uncle going to take up Miss Glyn's vacant office and find fault, and to talk at her like Mrs. Mush?

Uncle Edward laughed and shook his tawny mane as he looked in her face.

"I see you are amazed at my audacity, my dear," he said, "but you will get used to it."

He spoke so composedly that Sybil was confounded. She thought a great deal of her dignity, and it was plain he thought nothing of it.

"Come now," he said good-humouredly, "confess it is a butterfly life. I do not see you study, sew, or even read steadily. It is all fluttering about house, cloister, and garden, from morning till night."

"I have just left school," gravely replied Sybil, "and therefore do not want to study."

"Ah! very true."

And there was an odd twinkle in his eye which reminded Sybil of Mrs. Mush.

"I hate needlework," she continued.

"That is candid."

"And for steady reading, I have no time," she said with the greatest seriousness.

He laughed till he shook again, and his laugh, though not loud or boisterous, nevertheless answered his large frame and broad shoulders. It was clear, hearty, and free. Sybil felt very indignant, and reddened with vexation.

"Come, my dear," he said when his merriment was out, "do not look so grave, if you please, for, to tell you the truth, your father having asked my candid opinion of you last evening, I was obliged to give it. Upon which he requested me to take you in hand, which I mean to do, so do not wonder if my spare time is devoted to improving you."

Sybil's gay face lengthened considerably on hearing this.

"You see," he continued not unkindly, though with a touch of sarcasm which Sybil could but ill

endure, "you are, or think yourself, poetry; but I am prose from first to last—pitiless, stern, ruthless prose."

And prose he did look. Strong, massive prose, logical and, as he said himself, pitiless. Some flowers of fancy grew on that mighty stem, some gentle thoughts flowed from that clear firm mind, but they did not predominate. Goodness, and generosity, and nobleness you felt as you looked at or listened to him, but something Sybil missed, and the want of that something frightened her. He did not, or he would not see this. He made her sit down on the bench by the house; and then he sat down by her, and began catechising her concerning what she knew and how she knew it. It was a severe ordeal, and through that trying test they got on together as a giant and a fairy might, in the days when there were such people. The poor little fairy did not always get the best of it; for though the giant could be playful enough, he was playful, as giants are, in rather a dangerous way. His very kindness was careless, and, without meaning it, often cruel. He laughed at Sybil, who could not bear being laughed at, and he proved to Sybil, who innocently thought herself an ac-

complished young lady, that she knew a little of everything, and enough of nothing. At last she rebelled.

"Oh! dear," she said, petulantly, "that is very tiresome. Every one wants to improve me. I am sure I cannot have so many faults as all that? As if I could not improve other people, too, if I were to set about it."

"I daresay you could. Indeed, I have no doubt your wisdomship would find plenty to improve in me."

Sybil was silent, but her looks said plainly, "To be sure I could."

"But for all that, my dear, you must improve yourself first of all. Such is your father's wish."

"But I do not want to be a blue-stocking, or a teacher, uncle, or a seamstress either. I do not want to work."

"And find it pleasanter to do nothing!"

Tears rose to Sybil's eyes. Pride would not let them fall, but pride had much ado.

"I am not idle," she remonstrated. "I am always doing something."

"Yes, there is a useless sort of activity about you. I have noticed that, too."

Sybil reddened up in mute indignation; but luckily at that very moment Mr. Kennedy came towards them with an open letter in his hand.

"News for you, Pussy," he said, gaily. "Mrs. Ronald gives a party next week, and you are asked to it."

A flush of joy rose to Sybil's cheeks—her eyes sparkled again.

"Oh! dear!" she cried, clapping her hands, and dancing gaily. "I have never been to a real party before."

"Well, Pussy, there is a beginning to all things."

"But what shall I wear?" asked Sybil, looking from her father to her uncle in great perplexity.

"Edward will advise you best," said Mr. Kennedy. "I never go to parties, and he does."

"But you will go to this?"

"Yes, Pussy, to take you. Tell that girl what she is to wear, Ned. I am in a hurry."

He walked away, leaving Sybil rather indignant at being referred to her censorious uncle on a matter of dress.

Her uncle, however, seemed equal to everything, for he looked keenly at Sybil, and said,

"You must wear pink, Sybil. Anything light in texture, with plenty of roses."

Sybil knew that pink suited her, and she was fond of roses. She was beginning to think that her uncle had a great deal of judgment, when she exclaimed, with sudden dismay,

"I have got no pink dress, and no money."

"Oh! what a pity the letter is gone!" he said.

"But it is not a pity. I have a white dress, which will do very well, and I can always get roses. But how shall I wear them, uncle?"

"How! let me see."

He looked down into her face with a kind, admiring smile.

"Nature has given you your share of roses," he said; "beautiful, ingenuous roses," he added, as she blushed steadily beneath his gaze. "Keep them long, my dear—keep them long."

Sybil laughed saucily. Of course she would keep her roses. Time did not exist for her, or was one of those vague, abstract truths, of which youth takes no heed."

"Next week!" she said. "I must see about it at once—must I not, uncle?"

"Ay! my dear, be energetic about *that!*"

But Sybil would not heed his reproachful tone. She turned a deaf ear to admonition. She was going to a party, and she must prepare for it with all speed.

"Good-bye, uncle," she said, saucily, as she lightly ran away.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE week of preparation did not prove a friendly week between uncle and niece. Mr. Kennedy's brother continued his investigations into Sybil's mental state, and these were so unfavourable to the soundness of her intellectual culture, that his opinion, freely expressed, concerned Mr. Kennedy, and deeply displeased his daughter. When, on the evening of the party, Sybil being fully dressed, went down to the library to show herself to her father, she was unpleasantly surprised to find her uncle in his stead. He sat writing a letter—he was not included in Mrs. Ronald's invitation—and looked up slowly on hearing the door open. He saw Sybil standing on the threshold, and with a smile he said,

"Are you afraid of me, Sybil?"

Her only reply was to come forward with a stateliness which amused him much. He looked

at her keenly from head to foot, but said not one word. Sybil fanned herself, and said impatiently:

"Well, how am I dressed?"

"So—so."

Now Sybil was very well dressed, and she knew it. She wore a clear white muslin, trimmed with some costly laces, which she had inherited from her mother, and exquisite roses blushed on her bosom, and were woven in a wreath in her dark hair.

"So—so," she echoed, a little indignantly; "and my muslin is Indian, and the lace is beautiful, and my roses cost five francs a-piece, says papa, and——"

"And I shall break every heart this evening," he put in.

Sybil blushed a little.

"I do not want to break any hearts," she said; "but I like to be well dressed, and I am pleased to be admired."

"That is honest, Sybil."

"I know you do not admire me," she resumed, a little warmly, "but others may."

"My dear, uncles do not admire their nieces—I mean, as a rule."

Tears stood in Sybil's eyes.

"My father admires me," she said—"not because I deserve it, but because he loves me."

Her uncle looked at her, as much as to say, "Well?"

"Well," she said, "I cannot help seeing it, uncle—you do not like me."

"Indeed!" he replied.

"Ay, indeed; and it is hard to have even one uncle who does not like me."

"May I ask to know what are your grounds for such a conclusion?"

"You are always blaming me—always censuring, always finding fault," she said; "and if you liked me, would you do that?"

"Sybil, I give you sure proof of a true friendship and true liking. You have faults which spoil you, and you are too good to be spoiled. Come, sit down here, and listen to me. You are seventeen—that is to say, very young—you are also very pretty, Sybil, very amiable, and decidedly clever; but——"

He had no time to continue. His niece had thrown her arms around his neck, and was hugging him with more gratitude than gentleness.

"Dear, good old Uncle Neddy," she cried, with ardour, "how I have wronged you! I thought you hated me, and I almost hated you. Oh! how I have been mistaken!"

"There, my dear, that will do," he said, gently putting her away; "you have not heard me out."

"Oh! you are going to blame now."

"Just so. I am going to tell you that, if you have these charming gifts, you have some faults. You are vain, Sybil, and hasty, and frivolous."

"Thank you," cried Sybil, starting from his side with sudden wrath—"I am much obliged to you, uncle," and she darted out of the room, and would hear no more.

Sybil felt thoroughly vexed, and could scarcely restrain her tears, but her spirits returned as she drove with her father to the house of Mrs. Ronald. This was to be her first ball, and her presence in it, so eventful to her, was to be momentous to Mrs. Ronald. But in order to understand this, we must give some account of this lady, and of the little world which Sybil was going to enter.

The pleasant coasts of France have long been haunted by tribes of English, in search, some of

economy, others of variety, and some again of a convenient refuge. To this latter class none of the English residents in the little town of Saint Vincent luckily belonged. They paid their way in the new country, and need not have been ashamed to hold up their heads in the old. Mrs. Ronald was one of the earliest settlers in the British colony of Saint Vincent. She was rich in this cheap place, and as she gave good dinners and pleasant parties, she was popular. Now it had from the first been the ambition of this good lady's life to reconcile France and England. Alas! the *entente cordiale* proved no easy matter even in Saint Vincent. The provincial French are a jealous and exclusive race, and nowhere were they more so than in this western nook. They resented English intrusion, and showed that resentment by obstinate coldness and reserve. They would not make these strangers welcome, and even the neutral ground of the casino saw two camps, not inimical, indeed, but certainly not friendly. When subscription balls took place there during the bathing season, France danced on one side, and England on the other. Now Mrs. Ronald wanted to put an end to this, and to

have a French as well as an English connexion.

Years passed, however, and brought her no nearer to her object; but at length Providence gave her an opening.

An old French lady fell in the street at Mrs. Ronald's door, and was picked up, taken in, and hospitably cared for by that lady. She proved quite as useful in her way as the fairy in the old nursery tales, for though poor and rather silly, she was powerfully connected, and held Saint Vincent, so to speak, in the hollow of her hand. It pleased her to be grateful to her benefactress; perhaps it also pleased her to partake now and then of Mrs. Ronald's good cheer. She certainly exerted herself in that lady's favour, and compelled the most stubborn to receive and visit this stranger. Mrs. Ronald was a clever woman. Give her an inch, and she would take an ell. She kept and improved her position long after grass and daisies grew on the grave of her patroness. But she found it even beyond her power to make her English and her French friends coalesce. She gave dinners at which the English talked English, and the French talked French. She gave balls; and either there was a dearth of English partners or

French ladies were wanting. Repeated failures could not dishearten Mrs. Ronald. Her aim was noble and philanthropic. She considered herself a link between the two nations, and she relied on the goodness of her cause. Once more Providence came to her aid, and justified her trust.

The casino was burned down, and, owing to want of funds, not rebuilt. Mrs. Ronald's heart beat with joy when she heard the news. She had them now, she had. She lived in an old château with ample rooms. She was one of the few people who could give a great ball. The dancers, who formed a powerful majority on both sides, were at her mercy. She would not indulge them at once, and only issued her invitations when she knew that they would be accepted thankfully. As this shrewd lady had expected, so did it come to pass. Everyone she had asked came; but here ended her success. The ball was crowded, indeed, but it was dull; and this was the ball to which Sybil had been asked.

It was rather late when Mr. Kennedy's carriage drove up the gravelled avenue of the old brick château in which Mrs. Ronald resided. Lights were shining in all the windows, and the calm

moonlight slept on the clipped yews of the old-fashioned garden on either side.

"I am sure I shall enjoy myself," cried Sybil gaily. "Do you hear the music? Oh! if dear Blanche were here!"

"Pussy, your husband will be jealous of Miss Cains."

"My husband!—who is he?" asked Sybil. "What is he like?"

Mr. Kennedy smiled, but did not answer. Sybil felt a little fluttered. Her father could not be wanting her to get married, surely! Her colour rose, her dark eyes took a deep, wondering look, which had not left them when they entered Mrs. Ronald's ball-room, and which made her look so strangely pretty, that admiring looks and a half-murmur of praise greeted her appearance.

"Sybil, you are the prettiest girl present," whispered her father.

Sybil blushed crimson, and cast a shy look around, and felt and saw that it was true.

It so happened that pretty girls, English and French, were scarce in Saint Vincent, and that of all present none could compare, for brilliancy of complexion and elegance of carriage, with Sybil.

None, too, had eyes like hers, deep, soft and lustrous—eyes that would have redeemed a plain face, and that gave hers something very like beauty.

Within five minutes of her entrance, Sybil was the queen of the ball; and before a quarter of an hour was over many a faithless knight had forsworn his allegiance, and laid it at the feet of this fair young conqueror. When she danced, there was a crowd to look at her, when she rested there was another crowd—male, of course, not feminine—eager to secure her hand, or, failing this, to catch a look, a smile, or to win a stray word.

Mr. Kennedy's eyes sparkled with delight. He had felt sure that in the little world of Saint Vincent, where a new face was an event, Sybil would have what is called a success, but he had not expected anything so complete as this. Sybil, though at first rather startled at the admiration she excited, soon grew reconciled to it. Her flushed cheek and bright eyes told a story of gentle triumph. She did not, indeed, exult over her conquered rivals, but she surrendered herself to the joy of victory, and in that joy she forgot

the pain and the mortification she was unconsciously inflicting.

Mrs. Ronald did not know what to think of the unexpected turn Sybil's appearance had given to her party. It was no longer dull, certainly, but then it was getting almost more animated than was either safe or pleasant; for the ball-room was a battle-field, in which two parties strove for victory.

"My dear Madame Ronald," said Madame de Lonville, in a whisper, "who is she?"

Madame de Lonville was a lady who kindly made her neighbour's business her own, and whom her neighbour, French or English, rather dreaded. Mrs. Ronald always asked her out of policy, and out of policy now gave her the required information. Madame de Lonville's little round eyes shone again in her round face.

"Pretty and rich," she said; "but not much family, eh? They had a vulgar English visitor some time ago, you remember?"

Mrs. Ronald deprecated all knowledge of Mr. Kennedy's family or visitors. Madame de Lonville nodded shrewdly and waddled off to Sybil, with whom she managed to enter into conversation.

"Now, if she marries her to one of these men," thought Mrs. Ronald, "not one of the girls will ever forgive me."

For be it said, *en passant*, Madame de Lonville was an inveterate match-maker.

"My dear Mrs. Ronald," said Mr. Grafton Wilkes, a middle-aged single man, who had retired to Saint Vincent after an expensive campaign in the London world, "you deserve public thanks for bringing out this sweet little creature. She is not a beauty, but——"

Mr. Grafton Wilkes walked away after uttering this expressive conjunction.

"Good gracious! my dear Mrs. Ronald, what a little flirt!" whispered Mrs. Rainie, whose three daughters sat neglected and sulky; "do look at her dancing with that Frenchman, and that is his betrothed looking on. I declare, her face makes my heart ache. I suppose that low Mr. Smith was related to them. She is like him."

Poor Sybil was indeed dancing with a very handsome young man, smiling prettily at his flattering speeches. And a pale fair girl stood watching them with misery on her face. Twenty such speeches did Mrs. Ronald hear within the next

half-hour. She began to feel seriously alarmed—the *entente cordiale*, the work of years, the consummation so devoutly expected, was seriously compromised, and all because Sybil was pretty and carried everything before her. She heartily wished she had never asked her, and watched her triumphant progress with silent vexation. One thing was clear: the men, with few exceptions, were on Sybil's side, and, with exceptions as few, the women were against her. Now, it is woman who rules the social world; and if woman, French or English, decreed that Mrs. Ronald's imprudence was to be chastised by future desertion, why, Mrs. Ronald must submit to her fate.

"I shall never get over this," thought Mrs. Ronald, with a sinking heart—"never."

"Why, what a pleasant discovery you have made in the world of pretty faces," said a cheerful voice at Mrs. Ronald's elbow.

It was Mrs. Brunton who spoke. Mrs. Brunton was neither young nor pretty, but she had a cheerful beaming face; and Mr. Brunton, on whose arm she leaned, was, if that might be, a more cheerful-looking gentleman than his wife was a lady. They were a suitable little pair, fond of

company, of young people, and of pretty faces.

"I think she is quite as pretty as your first, dear," continued Mrs. Brunton, addressing her husband; for she was his second wife, as he was her second husband.

"Well, my dear, I think she is," replied Mr. Brunton. "Poor Fred used to say, you know, that Mrs. Brunton was a rosebud——"

"No, not a rosebud," interrupted Mrs. Brunton, whose first was "poor Fred,"—"a rose without any thorns."

"Ah! to be sure, a rose without any thorns. You never knew Fred, Mrs. Ronald, did you?—poor Fred Smith, one of the best, warmest, finest fellows I ever met. There never was such a man, I think."

"Indeed," said Mrs. Ronald, who saw with an aching heart that Sybil had carried off another prize—a wealthy bachelor, at whom there had been considerable angling in the English spinster world.

Mrs. Brunton, who was shrewd, though good-humoured, saw this too, and shook her head.

"Ah!" she said, "that little Irish beauty will have made many a sore and angry heart before the night is over."

"I am afraid she will," replied Mrs. Ronald; "and to tell you the truth—" a gentle cough behind her interrupted what she was going to add. Mrs. Ronald looked round and saw her companion, Miss Spencer.

"A friend of Mr. Kennedy's," she whispered, "wants him on important business, and Miss Kennedy must leave as soon as the quadrille is over."

Mrs. Ronald looked interested.

"Is that Mr. Smith come back, then?" she whispered.

"Oh! no; this is a very handsome and gentlemanlike man."

"He did not send in his card?"

"No, he introduced himself as Mr. Kennedy's friend."

Mrs. Ronald thought this odd, and, commissioning Miss Spencer to go and find out Mr. Kennedy in the card-room, she went up herself to Sybil, and gave her the stranger's message.

Sybil's bright face grew clouded with disappointment and discontent.

"He does it to provoke me," she said petulantly; "I shall tell him so."

She obeyed the summons, however. Mrs. Ronald, who felt inquisitive, accompanied her downstairs.

"Now, uncle, that is too bad," she cried, as he came forward and bowed to Mrs. Ronald, who stared in much surprise on hearing the word, "uncle," for it was difficult to see two men more different than were Mr. Kennedy and his brother.

"Yes, Pussy, it is," gaily said her father.

He hastily apologised to Mrs. Ronald, hurried his daughter away, and, entering the carriage after her and his brother, he said in an anxious voice, which contrasted with his gay tone awhile back.

"What is it, Ned?"

"A telegram from Parkes," was the brief reply; "he has written—how is it we did not get the letter?"

Syhil felt very cross with her uncle. What did she care about Parkes and his letter? Or why could not Parkes wait till morning?

CHAPTER IX.

THE silent drive home did not soothe Sybil's temper, and when they reached the house she hardly condescended to look at her uncle. She ran up the staircase, uttering a careless and scarcely civil "good night, uncle," and though he followed her closely, she never looked round.

"You may say good-bye," he said as they reached the landing together, "for I shall be gone before you waken."

Sybil turned round and held out her hand remorsefully.

"Come in here," he said pushing open the door of the drawing-room, where a light was burning.

Sybil obeyed. He shut the door after her, and gave her a chair, but took none himself.

"This is your first ball," he began.

"Oh! pray don't scold!" interrupted Sybil in a tone of alarm.

"I only mean to warn, Sybil. As I was waiting for you below, some ladies came down. Their comments upon you were very severe. Do you know how many enemies you made this evening? —how much pain you inflicted?"

"I wanted to pain no one," again interrupted Sybil.

"But you did not care to avoid it. The pleasure of the hour was all in all to you, as the pain of that same hour was all in all to others. I know you cannot help being admired, but you can help rousing the world up against you. It is very fickle, Sybil. May be it will smile some day when your heart is breaking. Think of it well."

Sybil shook her head gravely.

"All that for a dance at a ball," she said.

"Well, it is a long sermon for a brief sin," he replied with a smile, "but then I am ambitious for you, Sybil. Think of what you are, my dear, and of what you might be."

"Well, what am I?" saucily asked Sybil.

He looked at her, and smiled.

"You are a pretty girl, Sybil."

"And what else?"

"That is just it—you are a pretty girl, and there is an end of it."

Sybil reddened. She was pleased and pained. His look, as it rested upon her, expressed admiration, and that was pleasant; but admiration thus qualified, was worse than censure, and Sybil felt it painful.

"I might say more if I had time," he resumed, looking at the clock, "but I must be brief. Do not think, however, that I am going to fall into the commonplace cant of the nothingness of beauty. No, Sybil, whenever you are told that beauty is nothing, do not believe it. What! beauty the type of mind and goodness, of heaven itself, nothing! It is a heresy to say it, Sybil. It is a falsehood, against which man has protested for the last six thousand years. Beauty is much, and, for my part, when I see a good, beautiful, and accomplished woman, I feel that she is the gem of creation."

"Ah! that is just Blanche," cried Sybil, ardently; "she is all you say—good, beautiful, and accomplished, uncle."

He looked at her and smiled. Gently and ten-

derly he smoothed her hair, and twisted one of her long curls around his finger.

"You are a true, generous, noble little creature," he said.

"Uncle."

"Yes, child."

"Mrs. Ronald gives a party next week—am I to dance if I go?"

She stood before him, her eyes all innocence, a demure smile on her lips. He smiled too.

"Yes, you may dance," he said, "but do not take away the partners from the other girls."

He watched her without seeming to do so. He saw her standing before him irresolute, and triumphant, brooding over his last words, and hesitating between duty and pleasure. At length she looked up, and said, saucily, "I shall try, uncle."

"No, Sybil, do not; it is too hard."

He spoke so severely, that tears rose to Sybil's eyes.

"What's the matter, Pussy?" said her father, entering the room.

"Uncle has been scolding me," she said, angrily; and, without giving her uncle another look, she walked out.

As she closed the door she heard her father saying, "What has Pussy done?" and his brother replying, "She has been dancing too much." But it was as well she did not hear what followed. Mr. Kennedy anxiously inquired if Pussy had overheated herself, and when Uncle Edward replied, "No, but she has taken away all the partners from the other girls," Mr. Kennedy only laughed, and carelessly said, "Let her, Neddy," in a tone which showed that he enjoyed his daughter's triumph.

Sybil entered her room in some wrath.

"I detest uncle," she thought; "he is cynical, and disagreeable, and I do not wish him to marry dear Blanche. He is not worthy of her."

Sybil was undressing as she thought thus. With a hasty hand she pulled the wreath of roses from her hair, and the bunch of roses from her bosom. Denise had fallen asleep in a chair whilst waiting for her young mistress, and Sybil, though she had a warm temper, had also a warm kind heart, and did not waken the poor tired girl.

"I wonder he could think of Blanche," indignantly continued Sybil, in her soliloquy; "does he suppose that she would get no admiration, and,

getting it, would not like it? But, good gracious! is that a letter from her?"

A sealed letter lay on her toilet-table. She seized it, tore it open, read a few lines, then looked at the direction. It was in a hand which bore no likeness to that of Blanche Cains, and it was not addressed to Sybil. For a moment she remained amazed and bewildered, then she folded up the letter with a trembling hand. What had she done?—what would her father say? Sybil felt frightened, and she had some cause to feel so. That letter had been left on her table, because she had told Denise she expected one from her friend. It was important, and she had caused its delay; it was mysterious, and she had half read it. Denise now awoke with a start, and gave her young mistress a confused stare.

"Go to bed, Denise," said Sybil, gently; "I am not undressing yet, and you need not wait for me."

"Oh! but I must," said Denise.

"No, do not—I do not wish it."

She spoke so positively, that the servant girl obeyed. Sybil listened to her heavy sleepy footstep trudging upstairs, then softly stole down

to the library, guided by the sound of voices. She knocked at the door, but they did not hear her, and they spoke so loud, that she could not help hearing them. They spoke in English, too, and, believing her to be upstairs, they thus thought themselves safe from the servants.

"He has been my curse, and is so still," passionately said her father.

Rather than hear more, Sybil abruptly opened the door, and stood before them with the letter in her hand. They both seemed so much surprised at her sudden appearance, that Sybil forgot her intended preamble, and said hurriedly:

"I am very sorry. It was left on my table by mistake."

Her uncle was nearest to her; he took the letter from her, looked at the direction and the broken seal, then at Sybil, but said not one word; whilst Mr. Kennedy, unconscious of Sybil's real offence, said angrily:

"Why did you come in without knocking?"

"I wished to give the letter at once."

"How came you to have it?" he asked, with sparkling eyes.

"I expected one from Blanche Cains, and

Denise, thinking this was it, put it on my table."

"I am sick of Blanche Cains," angrily said Mr. Kennedy—"what is it about, Ned?"

His brother handed it to him. Mr. Kennedy glanced over it, and said briefly:

"You must go at once—I shall go and fetch you the papers."

He rose, and left the library without looking at Sybil. She stood, pale and trembling, before her uncle. He stretched out his arm, and drew her towards him.

"You read the direction?" he said, with a quiet but searching look.

Sybil nodded.

"And what else, Sybil?"

"The first three lines, uncle."

"Well, do not look so distressed, child. If I had a seal by me," he added, with his kindest smile, "I would put it on your lips, as Alexander did with Hephæstion, I believe; but since I have not, I simply enjoin silence upon you. I am not afraid of you, Sybil. You have an open face, too open by far, but I know well enough that you can keep your tongue silent, and I need no more."

Sybil looked at him. There was a question she

longed to put, but his eyes gave her no encouragement.

"No," he said, "for my part I should not care, but your father would. Trust to him, child, trust to him."

"I do, I do!" cried Sybil, eagerly; "but, uncle, I cannot forget what I have read, and it was about the dreadful Mr. Smith!"

"Well, what about it?"

"But, uncle, there *is* some danger for you—I cannot help knowing that."

"Never mind, child, the danger is not great, surely, since I am going to do the very thing against which that letter warns me."

"Oh! pray don't!—pray don't do it!" she entreated.

He felt her trembling, and he thought she was cold. He chid her for running down in her muslin dress, with her neck and arms uncovered, and spying her father's cloak on a chair, he took and wrapped it around her.

"I am not cold," said Sybil, bursting into tears; "but I am unhappy. Oh! why will you go? And why are you so kind, when I know I have been so naughty."

"I go, Sybil, because I must, or justly forfeit honour; and I am kind, as you call it, because, spite all your sins, and they certainly are heinous, I cannot help being fond of you. And now," he added, taking his handkerchief and gently wiping her tears away, "suppose you leave me—I hear your father coming back, and you will only interfere with us."

Sybil turned to the door, then came back.

"You are sure you forgive me?" she said.

"My dear, I was never angry with you. I cannot forgive."

"Well, but tell me again I have done no harm by that letter."

"Then, indeed, if Edward tells you that, he will tell you a precious story," sharply said her father, entering the library with a packet of papers in his hands. "He has lost what neither you nor anyone else can give him back, Sybil."

Sybil heard him and remained mute. She looked from one to the other in such distress, that her father said more kindly,

"Never mind, Pussy, there is no great harm done—there, go away."

"Good-bye, uncle," said Sybil, in a subdued voice.

"Good-bye, my dear," he replied kindly, shaking her by the hand; "and do not trouble your little heart."

"Do leave us, child," impatiently said Mr. Kennedy.

Sybil obeyed; but she could not help feeling that if her father humoured her little follies more than her uncle, he was not so kind in the hour of grief as this severe censor.

And it was grief, very genuine grief, she felt, as she entered her room once more. Her first evening of pleasure and triumph ended sadly. For after all she liked her strict uncle, and there was danger in store for him, danger all the more formidable that she knew its existence and not its nature. Her heart sank as her imagination, and it was a fertile one, pictured many a form of peril lying in wait for her uncle. Whither was he going?—she did not even know that. But the letter she had glanced at was in English, and it spoke of Mr. Smith in words of warning. What had he done?—how had it happened? She sat, still dressed, on the edge of her bed, perplexing her mind with these questions, when she heard him entering his room. No doubt he was pack-

ing. Of course he would go down soon. She resolved to wait for him, and just put one question to him before he left. It was not long ere his door opened again. At once Sybil stole out, and before he had reached the head of the staircase, she stood before him.

"My goodness, child!" he said, in a tone of concern, "do you want to take your death of cold, that you wonder about this chill house in that muslin dress? Now, birdie, be wise, and get at once into your warm bed."

"I am not cold, uncle, and I shall not delay you, only do pray tell me this—'Will you come back?'"

"I hope so."

"Oh! but, uncle, can you come back, or will there be anything to prevent you?"

"God knows," he replied, rather gravely—"what man is master of his fate?"

Sybil looked at him with such distress, that he at once repented having spoken so freely.

"You soft-hearted little thing," he said, "do not trouble about a great, careless fellow like me—men are sure to do, Sybil."

"Oh! but if I should never see you again?" said Sybil, ready to cry.

"Why, the loss would be mine, not yours; but as there is some danger of it, Sybil, good-bye; and if it be for ever, why, let it be for ever, my dear little girl."

He took her in his arms, and kissed her, then hurried down the staircase. Sybil heard the door of the house close upon him. He was gone—gone, spite the warning words which she could not forget: "Go farther than Saint Vincent if you can;" and instead of going farther, he was returning to seek and brave that unknown peril. What would happen?—would he ever come back?—should she ever see again that kind face, which had looked down so leniently into hers this evening? She re-entered her room, undressed, and went to bed, but she could not sleep. She lay awake in a burning fever, remembering every word she had read, or he had spoken, and foreseeing none but the most sorrowful catastrophes.

CHAPTER X.

TO have walked about a chill house in her muslin dress gave Sybil a three weeks' illness. Mr. Kennedy was much alarmed; then, when his fears, which were indeed groundless, calmed down, he was concerned at the depressed state of Sybil's mind. Anxiety had added to the fever of her complaint. When she questioned Mr. Kennedy concerning her uncle's welfare, his impatient replies, "Your uncle is very well," or "Your uncle will do," rather increased than lessened her uneasiness. This she did not express, but he saw it, and feeling that it delayed her recovery, he reproved her for it.

"I tell you, child, that your uncle is very well," he assured her again and again.

"Will he come back?" plaintively asked Sybil.

"What makes you so anxious to have him?—I

never thought you doted upon him, Pussy."

Sybil reddened, and tossed restlessly in her bed. She could not, or, rather, she would not, tell all to her father. She would not tell him that every night she had the nightmare about her uncle and Mr. Smith—that she saw them engaged in every possible strife and contest, and that Mr. Smith was invariably the victor.

"The doctor said you could get up," urged Mr. Kennedy.

Sybil shook her head, and shut her eyes. She did not care about getting up. Her father was engaged, and what should she do up? There is no reasoning with sick people, so Mr. Kennedy knew, but he tried to administer a remedy.

"Perhaps your Aunt Glyn will come back now that Mr. Smith is gone," he said.

Sybil looked indifferent and cold.

"Or Mrs. Mush," suggested her father.

"I don't care about Mrs. Mush," languidly replied Sybil—"she only quizzes me."

Mr. Kennedy stooped and kissed her pale cheek.

"Shall it be the angelic Blanche?" he whispered.

"Oh!" cried Sybil, with a flush of joy, "that would be glorious!"

She hugged him, she laughed, she cried in her transport.

"Then get up and write to her," he said, tenderly.

Denise was summoned. Sybil got up and dressed, and when she was ready, her father came and carried her down in his arms to the library. At once she wrote her letter, and Mr. Kennedy, who had business in Saint Vincent, promised to post it himself.

Sybil remained sitting where he had left her, near one of the windows. She saw the sunlit cloister, the carved cross, the grasses that grew between the flags, and she felt languidly happy. The sense of recovery blended with the joy of seeing her friend again. She forgot her nightmare, Mr. Smith, and her uncle; or, rather, remembering him, she once more indulged in those reveries about him and Blanche Cains, which had already taken so strong a hold of her.

"Dear Blanche will be here next week, perhaps," she thought; "and as to that, so may uncle. If they are both here together, how can they help

liking each other? She is so handsome, so good, so accomplished; and he is so manly, so good, too, and though not so handsome as Blanche, very good-looking. Besides, he is wonderfully clever, and Blanche will like that. I can fancy how they will talk together. She will be quite a match for him, which I never am, and he will fall in love and be miserable, and tell *me* all about it, and I shall tell Blanche, and quiz her a bit."

Here a tap at the window panes made Sybil look up with a little start. She uttered a cry of surprise and joy on seeing her Uncle Edward looking at her from behind the glass. He stood in the cloister, a great-coat on his arm, and a carpet-bag in his hand—evidently he had just arrived. Sybil hastily rose and opened the window, and cried out,

"Oh! uncle, uncle, I am so glad."

"Are you, Sybil?" he replied, sparing himself the trouble of going round to the door by entering at once through the open window; "but how pale you look!" he added, in a tone of concern.

"I have been ill," replied Sybil; "but I am better now. Uncle, have you come to stay?"

"Oh! never mind the future," he carelessly

replied, looking rather worn and haggard; "you see that I have come back after all—and so you have been ill, birdie?"

"Oh! it was only a cold, bronchitis, or something of that sort. I am so glad you are at home again."

She looked very glad indeed, so glad that he felt moved thereby. His had been a solitary path from youth to manhood, with few flowers of affection springing by the way, and such stray blossoms as he got were not to be despised. He looked kindly at this young girl who gave him so cordial a greeting, hesitated whether to leave the room or not, then making up his mind, drew a chair near hers, sat down, and said,

"I suppose your father is busy?"

"He is at Saint Vincent."

"Oh! then I shall wait for him here."

"Do," said Sybil; "I have so much to say to you."

"Have you, though?"

"Yes. I have been thinking so much about you lately. Don't look at me so—I am not going to question. But since you have come back, I feel as if it must be."

Uncle Edward did not heed her. He searched the pockets of his great-coat with a look of alarm, then smiling, brought forth a packet, which he laid on Sybil's lap. She opened it, and saw bulbs of the finest kind, bulbs such as she had long wished for, but could not procure in Saint Vincent.

"Oh! how kind—how very kind you are!" she cried, with sparkling eyes.

"Am I though? I should have been a great deal kinder if I had known there was a chance of your escaping us, birdie. I can see you have been very ill whilst I was away."

He spoke very kindly. He spoke as if he really did care for her. Sybil felt that the depths of her heart were stirred.

"Uncle," she said, a little vehemently, "you may do or say what you like henceforth—I shall never quarrel with it again—never."

"My dear, I do not mean to find fault any more—I am going to become one of your admirers."

"No, don't—pray don't!" cried Sybil, alarmed; "you know my dear father spoils me, and I really do want some one to blame me."

"And kindly promote me to the office, so that you will hate me every now and then."

"Oh! no, not hate you."

"Every now and then there will be reconciliations and quarrels, and our friendship will be like a young torrent leaping over rocks and stones; whereas I would have it a fair, placid, flowing stream, both deep and still."

Sybil thought awhile, then said,

"Uncle, it is not friendship you feel for me."

"Indeed!—pray what is it?"

"It is liking, but not friendship. You tell me nothing—I mean, nothing that concerns yourself."

He reddened a little as he answered,

"I cannot; my secrets are not my own. If your friend, Miss Cains, had trusted you with her secret, would you tell me?"

"No—that would be treason."

"So it would, and terrible treason, therefore am I mute."

"She is coming," knowingly said Sybil—"the letter is gone."

Uncle Edward looked confounded.

"What! Miss Cains is coming here?" he exclaimed.

"She is."

"And she is coming here, Sybil?"

"Yes—why not? Papa saw me so dull, that he gave in. I thought he never would."

Her uncle looked grave, but said nothing.

"And you shall see her now," resumed Sybil.

"Why, what a marvel is this Miss Cains!" he asked, recovering his usual manner.

"I should think so—so beautiful, so clever, so amiable, and so good."

Uncle Edward's gray eyes lit.

"Take care, my dear," he said, "such a portrait may prove delusive. What if I find her short of all this?"

Sybil smiled securely.

"You will find her far beyond it," she replied, "for habit hides much from me which you must perceive."

"My dear, good little Sybil," kindly said Uncle Edward, "happy the man who gets *you*."

"What! with all my faults?" saucily said Sybil.

"Ay, indeed—only don't throw yourself away—do not."

Sybil nodded sagaciously.

"I shall try not to do so," she said, shrewdly.

"I do wish you would make a confidant of me when that time comes," he continued, "and let me advise or warn—will you?"

"No—yes," replied Sybil, a little startled; "but, uncle," she added, quietly, "I wish you would marry Miss Cains."

"Sybil!"

"Yes, I wish you would—I am sure you would make a good husband."

"I am much obliged to you for your good opinion of me."

"Ah! you think I take a liberty."

"Not I—only pray tell me on what that favourable opinion is grounded."

"Uncle, you are just and kind, therefore a good and amiable woman would be happy with you, and make you happy too."

"*Chi lo sa*," as the Italian sayeth. "Your friend is very perfect, Sybil; perhaps I require a spice of wickedness—something in your way, my dear."

Sybil blushed.

"I do not mean to be naughty again," she said, gravely.

"Do not be too sure of that. Who was it that was sick, and a monk would be——"

"Never mind," interrupted Sybil, with a merry twinkle in her dark eye—"we have nothing to do with him, have we?—and I come back to my starting-point: I wish you would marry Blanche Cains."

"There never was so inveterate a little match-maker! Why, what puts matrimony into your head this morning?"

"Selfishness. Oh! it would be so pleasant to have you both here."

"Yes, but suppose you take your wings and fly to some other nest, leaving the fair Blanche and your humble servant in the lurch."

Sybil replied a little impatiently, there was no fear of that just then, and came back to her argument.

"You see, uncle, Blanche is just the girl you *must* admire."

"What! Blanche again?"

"Yes, Blanche again, for, uncle, you are quite old enough to get married, and since dear Blanche is coming, that is just your opportunity. She is so good, and has such beautiful features, and—"

"You imprudent girl!" he interrupted. "I shall lose my heart on your description; and then suppose the fair Blanche will have nothing to say to me, how shall I get it back?—my lost heart, of course."

Sybil laughed outright.

"You are not so susceptible as all that," she said, "and you are not going to lose your heart on my description."

"How can you tell? It was so that Colonel Hutchinson, who was both a Puritan and a Roundhead, fell in love with the lady whom he married, and a false report that she had wedded another nearly drove him distracted before he had even seen her face."

"Well, uncle, I shall say no more, of course, but I do not think that Blanche would have nothing to say to you—she has better sense, and better taste too."

"Thank you, my dear, I call that a nice little compliment; but, alas! what have sense or taste to do with these matters? Miss Cains and I may just prove foolish, and take a dislike to each other."

"Oh! but that would be too bad," exclaimed Sybil.

"What would be too bad?" asked Mr. Kennedy, unexpectedly coming in upon them.

Now, neither cared to answer this question quite sincerely. Nevertheless it was Sybil who spoke.

"Uncle has taken a prejudice against poor dear Blanche. But, oh! papa, how soon you are home again. Is the letter gone?"

"Indeed it is, and on its way by this. So Edward is not smitten before-hand with the fair Blanche? What heresy!"

"It *is* heresy!" said Sybil, gravely.

They both laughed at her, and she laughed too, but she saw them exchange a perplexed, troubled look, which puzzled her. They soon left the room together, and as they did so, Sybil heard her father answering her uncle:

"I could not help it."

The truth flashed across her mind in a moment. It was her uncle who had caused the departure of Mrs. Mush; it was her uncle who had prevented the coming of Blanche Cains. How unsociable of him; but maybe he had a reason. Then came

some thoughts of Mr. Smith, but they took no definite shape, and floated dimly through her mind —ghosts of the fancy, such as haunts us all.

CHAPTER XI.

LATER, when she looked back over this season of her youth, Sybil often thought that these were perhaps its happiest days. Her recovery was rapid, and her father's tenderness, her uncle's kindness, added to the buoyant sense of life within her. To crown all, Blanche had written, and was coming, and hope and expectation filled Sybil's heart. Many were the happy evening hours she now spent with her two companions, sometimes in the library, sometimes in the garden. Her Uncle Edward had taken Sybil in hand in a gentler spirit than at first. Mr. Kennedy sat and read the newspaper, and wrote his letters, whilst his brother read or studied with Sybil. He seemed resolved to atone for all previous harshness by the mildness of his present teaching. Teaching, in one sense, it was not, for Sybil took no actual lessons, but conversation has its uses and its power.

Sybil's mind was by no means a weak one, though her tastes were often frivolous, and it amused Uncle Edward to draw her out, and especially to provoke her. Their conversations were downright contests, in which he invariably took the part allotted to the challenger in the ancient tourneys. He sat in his saddle, lance in rest, ready to bear down whosoever entered the lists. Sybil's knights might be brave and fair—heroes, poets, philosophers—Uncle Edward cared not. His business was to fight, and he fought stoutly, till he either conquered his poor little enemy, or magnanimously gave her a chance, and let her escape. Sybil liked this very much. Indeed she thought that arguing was decidedly one of the pleasures of life, and she lost no opportunity of securing that pleasure. Uncle Edward might be in the most pacific mood; Sybil cared not, she liked war for war's own sake, and ever found the means to rouse him. Uncle Edward was prose—or, at least, said he was—and Sybil knew how to sting him by an extra dose of poetry.

On rather a dreary evening, when the sea wind blew dismally, and the rain beat against the window-panes, Sybil, looking round her with a sigh—her

father was buried in the *Times*, and Uncle Edward sat with folded arms, not heeding her—exclaimed dolefully,

"I do wish I had been born five hundred years ago!"

"Five!" gravely said Uncle Edward.

"I do," persisted Sybil. "I hate these matter-of-fact days of ours, I do."

"Now, little lady," said Uncle Edward, looking up, "no nonsense."

"It is not nonsense, uncle, but delightful sense. It is!"

"I wonder how you would have liked it, though."

"Amazingly, Uncle Ned."

Uncle Ned fell into the trap, and shook his heavy hair impatiently.

"Well, I wonder how you would have liked living in the days of that brave and loyal knight Bertrand Du Guesclin, whose chronicle I have been reading to-day. A true knight he was; but alack! the day, those were queer times to live in, Sybil. Some fighting then went on between England and France, and money having been at all times the sinews of war, good Bertrand gets into my

lady, his mother's chamber, and carries off her jewel-box. Madame Mére, though as pious a lady as could be, resents this. Ere long, however, good Bertrand makes amends. He encounters and slays a certain English knight, in whose baggage another jewel-box is found. This he dutifully presents to his mother, who takes it, poor pious soul, and rejoices at having so good a son."

"I do not believe that Du Guesclin was a thief," indignantly said Sybil.

"A thief!—who said he was? But he lived in the fourteenth century, and *that* was an arrant thief, for it held these things lawful, and admired and recorded them. For all that, very pretty is the chronicle of Du Guesclin. There is a description of an army before battle, with lances gleaming, trumpets sounding, and banners waving, which will charm you, Sybil, only you will do as all smoothers-down of the Middle Ages do, you will leave out the black spots, the free companies for instance, whom excommunication could not keep under, and who, when they went to be relieved from the Pope's ban, did so plundering on their way."

"Uncle," solemnly said Sybil, "you take one-

sided views. To be sure, those were rough times, but then think how poetic they were!"

"I wonder who saw the poetry then, Sybil? The minstrels, the troubadours? I doubt it. The true poet sings of war, but he is a child of peace. Besides, the finest minds did not turn to poetry then. They took refuge in the cloister, and hid there from the stormy world without. As to the women, I wonder how they liked the poetry of an era which made them, high or low, the prey of the strong. Why, a little girl like you, Sybil, discussing these matters would then have been something monstrous."

Now, the intellectual rights of her sex were one of Sybil's weak or strong points. Uncle Edward had invariably opposed her pretensions on this score, and on hearing him appeal to this old ground of quarrel, she turned upon him at once.

"Ah!" she cried triumphantly, "I have got you, uncle—I have got you! What did you say last night?"

"Some foolish thing, I daresay."

"You said that the wish to know was the modern disease amongst girls."

"And so it is—a perfect depravity."

"Mediæval—mediæval!" cried Sybil clapping her hands. "You want to keep woman in the ignorance of the Middle Ages, and yet you invoke that ignorance of woman against them. I don't know logic, uncle, but I am sure you are wrong."

"I am afraid I am," said Uncle Edward, smiling.

Sybil ran to her father.

"I have beaten uncle in argument," she cried exultingly—"is it not glorious!"

"Yes, Pussy, if your victory be genuine."

A saucy "of course it is" was going to be Sybil's reply, but it was checked by the opening of the door.

An opening door may seem a very slight thing in daily life, but there are times when it is quite dramatic, and that even in the most common-place existence. So it proved now, for when the door of Mr. Kennedy's library opened it was to admit no less a person than Miss Glyn.

She came in erect, dignified, and, as Mr. Kennedy saw at a glance, prepared for action. Whatever he might feel at so unexpected a visit, he put on a look of joyful surprise, that sat admirably on his handsome, genial face.

"My dear Mary," he cried, "how very kind of you! My brother Edward—My sister-in-law, Miss Glyn."

Uncle Edward stood with his back to the fireplace. He bowed and smiled; but whether that smile was one of courtesy, or was suggested by the extraordinary expression that passed across Miss Glyn's face, Sybil who looked on could not determine. That some strange story was being even then enacted in her presence, she saw, but its nature she could not divine. Miss Glyn at length drew a deep breath, and looked at her brother-in-law.

"That is your doing, Mr. Kennedy," she said, and she walked out of the room, crimson and indignant.

Mr. Kennedy laughed. Uncle Edward smiled.

"My presence in this house does not seem very acceptable to Miss Glyn," he said carelessly.

"She will get used to it," as carelessly said his brother, and they spoke at once of other things.

Sybil's perplexity was plainly expressed in her looks, yet neither brother seemed to see or to heed it. She gazed at them earnestly, and they no more minded her than if she were not in the room. Her curiosity was strangely roused. "Perhaps aunt

will tell me," she thought, and she stole out of the library and glided upstairs.

Miss Glyn was in her room; she was in the act of taking off her bonnet, but she put it on again as Sybil entered.

"You are going away, aunt?" cried Sybil.

"No," and the bonnet was taken off once more and tossed on the bed. Miss Glyn was an austere person, but she was also dignified. Such little bursts of temper were unknown to Sybil as connected with her aunt. She could not help saying,

"Aunt, what has happened?"

"I think you know," was Miss Glyn's sharp reply.

"I suppose you mean the coming of my Uncle Edward. Aunt, he is very good."

"I expressed no opinion on this subject," frigidly said Miss Glyn; "and I beg that we may drop it, Sybil. Indeed, we have already said too much."

"But, aunt, we have said nothing," rather petulantly replied Sybil; "and I wish you would not be prejudiced against him—he is not vulgar like Mr. Smith, but a perfect gentleman."

"I must really trouble you to leave me, Sybil; and as you go down, my dear, will you just ask your father to let me have a five minutes conversation with him somewhere—say in the drawing-room or in the dining-room—anywhere, in short."

Sybil, much abashed at the loftiness of her aunt's tone, obeyed at once. When she had reached the door, Miss Glyn called her back.

"Don't send that goggle-eyed French maid of yours with your father's answer," she said, tartly; "nor yet that heathenish fellow, Adonis."

"Narcisse," corrected Sybil; "no, aunt, I shall come myself."

She went down troubled and depressed, but not so felt Miss Glyn. She had come post-haste from London to Saint Vincent, and she had come expressly to expel Mr. Kennedy's brother. Mrs. Mush had apprised her of his existence, and as Miss Glyn objected to him infinitely more than to Mr. Smith, she had decreed that leave he must. But it is awkward to turn even objectionable people out of other men's houses; and composed though she looked, Miss Glyn was a little flurried when Sybil came back to tell her Mr. Kennedy was waiting for her in the drawing-room.

"Very well, child," she said, slightly agitated at the approaching battle; "I am going," but she waited to go till Sybil had left her again.

When Miss Glyn at length entered the drawing-room, she found Mr. Kennedy waiting for her there, as bland and smiling as if he did not know or guess what his sister-in-law wanted him for. Miss Glyn had resolved to be very cool, very ladylike, and yet very determined; but Mr. Kennedy's smile so provoked her, that she at once burst forth with a vehement,

"Mr. Kennedy, who is that man?"

Mr. Kennedy was all amazement. What man did Miss Glyn mean?

"That man whom I saw below, Mr. Kennedy."

"I suppose you mean my brother Edward."

"Your brother!—you have no brother!" cried Miss Glyn; "and I know it."

"I wonder, though, how either you or any one can know that," coolly said Mr. Kennedy.

"Because not a soul ever heard of him till he came here—that's all."

"My dear madam, *you* never heard of him; but allow me to assure you Edward has not reached his present age unseen and unknown."

He spoke with an audacious calmness which confounded Miss Glyn.

"Mr. Kennedy," she said at length, "when Mrs. Mush told me in London that your brother was here, I confess I thought she was inventing, as usual—for of course a person who talks so much as she does, must invent; but as there must be some foundation even for invention, I came prepared to find a new edition of that wretched Mr. Smith, but I was not prepared for this, Mr. Kennedy; and how you could or can betray your own child, and have a strange man in the house under pretence of his being her uncle, is more than *I* can understand. However, Sybil is *my* niece, and unless you turn me out, I warn you that I shall stay here and give her at least the protection of my presence."

Mr. Kennedy often boasted that he was a patient man, and that he could keep his temper under some trying circumstances. Any one that had looked at him then, as he heard his sister-in-law, must have acknowledged the truth of his boast. The smile, courteous and friendly, remained fixed on his face, but his eyes sparkled with anger. His words, however, matched with his smile.

"My dear Mary," he said, kindly, "how can you be so unjust as to suppose your presence here is not what I most wish for. Indeed, Sybil has been going rather wild in your absence, and your return is a Godsend. She has been to a party, and made quite a sensation since you left us. Her success was almost greater than I liked. I have been given to understand, by Mrs. Ronald, that I can get her a husband when I wish, and though, of course, the child is too young——"

"*I* do not think so," drily interrupted Miss Glyn; "and considering the peculiar circumstances of the case, I think your daughter cannot be married—well married, of course—too soon."

"Indeed!" said Mr. Kennedy, gravely. "Well," he added, after a brief pause, "you may be right in the main. We shall think over it."

But even this conciliatory speech could not soften Miss Glyn from her purpose. She gave her brother-in-law a hard, obstinate look of her brown eyes, and said, in a short, sharp tone,

"I warn you that I shall watch that man."

"You are very welcome," was his civil reply.

Miss Glyn felt she had better say no more, so, with a distant bend of the head, she left the apart-

ment, and returned to her own room. She there found Sybil, troubled and anxious.

"Oh! aunt, you are not going away again?" she entreated.

"Going away!—no, indeed! Mrs. Mush is so prudent and selfish that she would not remain; she got out of it, but I will stay for your sake, Sybil."

Miss Glyn longed to add a severe prohibition concerning speech, intercourse, and even looks, as connected with Sybil's impostor uncle, but prudence bade her be silent, and was luckily obeyed.

"Aunt, is there anything about—about Mr. Smith?" asked Sybil, all curiosity.

"It is worse—much worse!" solemnly said Miss Glyn; but she would say no more.

CHAPTER XII.

MISS GLYN'S watching began that same evening. She went down to the library resolved to discover some great fault, or vice, or mischief in the impostor—so she mentally called Sybil's uncle—for nothing would convince her that the relationship was at all genuine; but to her annoyance she failed. Uncle Edward was all she could wish with Sybil; he was kind, but not affectionate. When he reproved her, it was sensibly and shrewdly, and in look, manner, and bearing, he was the most consistent of uncles.

"It is all his art," indignantly thought Miss Glyn, and she gave him withering glances, which frightened Sybil, but which Uncle Edward bore with the greatest composure.

The next day rather added to Miss Glyn's exasperation, than lessened it; for she then learned

from Sybil the forthcoming arrival of Miss Cains; also that Mrs. Ronald was giving another party, and that she, Sybil, her father, and her uncle, were all going to it that evening. "And you must come too, aunt," added Sybil.

"That settles it all," moodily thought Miss Glyn; "the impostor will appear as her uncle, and his brother, and how will it ever be possible to efface the impression of such an announcement?"

Miss Glyn wondered whether she could not prevent Sybil from appearing in public with "the impostor!" but, not being of an inventive turn, found no better expedient than to be very ill, and go to bed just as Sybil was dressing for the party.

Sybil at once volunteered to stay and nurse her aunt; but her father, who, maybe, saw through Miss Glyn's illness, curtly forbade her to think of such a thing. So it was decreed that Sybil should go all the same.

"And I am so sorry, aunt, you cannot come," said Sybil, fastening on a pretty gold bracelet, her father's last present, by the bedside of Miss Glyn. "It is quite tiresome. Uncle Edward, too, declares he will not go, at the eleventh hour. It *is* provoking!"

"And why will he not go?" sharply asked Miss Glyn, vexed not to have known that before.

"He says he does not like parties. But it is tiresome. He let me think the whole day that he would be one of my partners. And it is most provoking; for it seems I must not waltz. French girls do not waltz as a rule down here; and Mrs. Ronald is afraid of affronting them—only I could have waltzed with my own uncle. But he never said he was not going till you went to bed with that bad headache of yours."

"He did it to aggravate me," thought Miss Glyn, irefully. "Well, well, we shall see yet." Vexation and annoyance had given her a genuine headache by this, and it was quite sincerely, though somewhat impatiently, that she requested to be left alone, and in darkness. Sybil went down, very sorry for poor aunt, vexed at not having a waltzer in Uncle Edward, but charmed at heart after all. For was she not going to a party, and should she not be admired and courted again? She was to wait for her father in the drawing-room; but when her hand was on the lock, she learned by his voice within that he was already there, for she heard him saying,

see how and why it is so, I do not feel very grateful."

"Sybil, do not be unjust."

He sat down by her and wanted to take her hand, but Sybil would not grant her sinning uncle this token of goodwill.

"Do not tempt me, Sybil," he said, a little reproachfully.

Of course on hearing this, Sybil tempted him at once.

"Dear, good old Uncle Neddy," she said, turning a beaming, coaxing face towards him; "I shall love you so much, I shall be *so* happy, if you will take me this one evening. Oh! do—pray do! I shall not dance a bit more than you like; and I shall not want to be admired—not I."

She shook her head in demure denial, and she looked so pretty, that Uncle Edward laughed, and said frankly,

"But you cannot help being admired, Sybil."

"And you will take me?" continued the little syren, softly smoothing his cheek with her little gloved hand.

There were many reasons for which, though he disliked going to Mrs. Ronald's, Uncle Edward

could not help wishing to please Sybil. He felt as the harshest sometimes feel, in the yielding mood. So looking down at her with a smile, he hesitated, said "Yes," then rising from her side, retracted it with a sharp, sudden "No."

"That is too bad," cried Sybil, and she burst into tears; but the yielding moment had flown by, and did not return.

Uncle Edward was sorry for her childish grief, but it was childish, and it did not change his purpose. Sybil's tears were still flowing behind her little cambric handkerchief, when a knock at the door ushered in Denise, and behind her Madame de Lonville. Sybil rose rather flushed and ashamed, then, seeing that Madame de Lonville was in full dress, and evidently going to the party, she flew to her in sudden hope.

"Oh! dear Madame de Lonville," she cried, in eager, broken French, "will you take me to Mrs. Ronald's? Papa and uncle cannot, and aunt is unwell, and I must stay at home. If your carriage is too small, ours is large enough. Oh! do."

Madame de Lonville was rather taken by surprise at this eager, vehement, and decidedly

indecorous address, but she soon recovered, and, indeed, so did Sybil, who, blushing and ashamed, begged her pardon, and requested her to be seated. Madame de Lonville complied with the request, and looked round, as if for Mr. Kennedy.

"Papa is busy," said Sybil, rather downcast, as it occurred to her that Madame de Lonville had come to talk business with Mr. Kennedy, "but that is uncle."

A cold bow and hard stare were exchanged by Uncle Edward and the lady; then she coughed a dubious cough, and said cautiously:

"I am so glad you were not gone—I was afraid you would be."

Sybil's heart beat. It could not be to take her that Madame de Lonville had come.

"My errand is a friendly one," resumed the lady, "yet do you know, dear Mademoiselle, that it is very hard to express—very?"

Sybil looked as she felt—very much perplexed. Madame de Lonville resumed:

"Just before setting out I received a visit from a gentleman, who will not be named. Through him I learned, my dear child, that you had better not go to Mrs. Ronald's to-night."

"And pray why so?" asked Sybil, reddening.

"My dear young lady, Mrs. Ronald has for years past been endeavouring to unite her French and English friends, and she never succeeded till the other evening, when your success made them unite—I mean the ladies, of course—against you. There was quite an uproar after you left; the ladies would not dance, and the gentlemen were punished. I see you are shocked—well, it is hard; only, as you took all their partners from them, they have decreed that you shall have no partner worth having. So if you go to Mrs. Ronald's to-night, no good dancer will ask you."

"Then I shall go," excitedly said Sybil, who looked two inches taller; "I will not remain here and confess myself conquered."

"But, my dear," impressively said Madame de Lonville, "think how dreadful to be the laughing-stock of a whole room. All the men—all save the one who revealed to me this cabal against you—have been compelled to promise that they would not ask you. The ladies declared that unless the gentlemen yielded they would rather never dance again than be affronted as they had been the

other evening. In short, my dear, it is a dancing strike."

Sybil was too much mortified to take any pleasure in Madame de Lonville's joke. Tears of vexation and pain rose to her eyes, and though pride would not let them fall, the struggle was a severe one.

"I consider it quite providential that my informant sustained such an accident that he could not possibly go to the party," resumed Madame de Lonville, "for otherwise he did not mean to tell me this. He meant to dance with, and avenge you, as he said, instead of which he would simply have committed you, as I told him. For what would the world have said if it had seen you dancing with none save one very handsome young man?"

Sybil did not answer—she could not. This was her first battle with the world, and she had come out of it conquered. What nothing else had done, jealousy of her had effected. She had reconciled the most opposed and antagonistic parties. It was a hard and bitter pill to swallow, and Sybil was not proud enough to conceal her grief. But what is one man's poison is another man's meat. Mrs.

Ronald, faithless woman, knew of this cabal, and rejoiced in it, for by sacrificing poor little Sybil to her enemies, she could fulfil the end of her existence, the purpose, no doubt, for which she had been created. Sybil did not know this, but Madame de Lonville knew it well, and Uncle Edward, who had listened to her revelations in attentive silence, knew it too. He knew more. Whilst Madame de Lonville spoke, his keen grey eyes never left her face, but read it like a book. We are sorry to add that Uncle Edward liked but indifferently well the story it told him.

"Miss Kennedy is much obliged to you Madame," he said gravely, "for the trouble you have taken on her behalf; but she was not going to Mrs. Ronald's, as you see. Perhaps you will have the kindness to tell Mrs. Ronald what a succession of small accidents deprive us all of the pleasure of seeing her this evening."

Madame Lonville would be most happy to do so, and she rose and took her leave, comforting poor woebegone Sybil.

"Oh! Miss Kennedy will be a match for them yet," gaily said Uncle Edward; "I suppose that if it becomes known her father too means to

give balls, it will change matters wonderfully."

"Why, yes, I do believe it will," slowly said Madame de Lonville, "the drawing-room is large at Saint Vincent. Do not fret, my dear—this is but a cloud, it will pass away."

She waddled off; Sybil was too miserable to think of seeing her out. But Uncle Edward escorted her with scrupulous politeness.

"Uncle, none of these girls shall ever enter this house," cried Sybil with flashing eyes, when he came back—"never, I cannot endure the sight of them. I had not deserved that. What! all against me, and the men too—only one who was not a coward."

Her lips trembled with indignation. Uncle Edward tried to comfort her; but she would not heed him. Sybil was ill-used and wronged, and declared in one breath that she "did not care a pin about it; and in the other, that she had never spent so miserable an evening."

"Wait till it is out," said Uncle Edward, looking at his watch, "it is not nine yet."

"Oh! Uncle!" cried Sybil with sparkling eyes, "do you think Blanche will come?"

"Strange things happen daily," he replied.

"Yes, but then how should you know?"

"How do I know a hundred things of which your ladyship has no conception. Birds in the air give me information. Your cat Minette tells me all sorts of things: chairs and tables let out secrets; in short, I have many ways and means of getting knowledge."

"Uncle, you are in very good spirits to-night," said Sybil; "you look ten years younger."

"Do I? Then I suppose it is because the spirit of prophecy is upon me. Or it is the prospect of seeing the peerless Blanche."

"She *is* peerless," cried Sybil; "and if she comes to-night I shall be glad to have remained within whatever you may think, Uncle."

"Ah! but remember that dreadful cabal."

"I do, and I scorn it—I know Blanche would. There, you laugh. Now, uncle, confess you have taken a prejudice against poor dear Blanche!"

"No—but I am apt to form my own opinions of people."

"I am not afraid for her," cried Sybil warmly, "she will stand the test—no, uncle, you cannot imagine what she is."

"I suppose not—only the more you praise her,

Sybil, my dear, the more I like you. I do believe you have one of the finest and the most generous natures I ever knew."

Sybil looked at him with some wonder. His grey eyes sparkled as they were bent on her. His pale face was slightly flushed, and overflowed with tenderness and admiration.

"Sybil, my dear little Sybil," he said, taking one of her hands and pressing it softly between his own, "the world is often very cruel. The world may tell you some day that Uncle Edward did not value you as you should be valued; that he held you lightly, and as a thing of little worth; never believe it Sybil—never. But believe me when I say that I love you truly and dearly—no brother ever loved a darling sister better."

"Nor uncle a niece," said Sybil gaily.

"Our years are more those of brother and sister than of uncle and niece," he replied; "and, Sybil, I don't want your respect so much as your confidence and affection."

"Well, then, uncle, I shall tell you something," confidentially said Sybil, drawing her chair nearer to his.

"Do, my dear."

"At first I did not like you at all—I mean before I saw you."

"Thank you."

"Then for two days I liked you."

"Go on."

"After that I disliked you."

"That was an improvement."

"Then I got to like you really, you know."

"All right."

"And now, uncle, I am quite fond of you."

She spoke triumphantly, but was somewhat amazed to see the change which came over Uncle Edward's face as she spoke. Infinite softness beamed in his eyes, but they did not gaze on her; his lips trembled with a smile, but it seemed to Sybil that in that smile she had no part.

"Uncle," she said, a little abruptly, "what are you thinking of?"

"Nothing, my dear; but I believe your friend has arrived—I heard a carriage."

Sybil started to her feet, and rushed downstairs, reckless of her Indian muslin dress, which caught in a treacherous nail, and got a fearful tear. In a moment she was at the gates, in another moment she was clasping Blanche Cains in her arms.

"Oh! Blanche," she cried, "I have got you at last—at last!"

A fair face was bent over hers, gentle lips were pressed to her cheek, and a fond pressure of the hand silently answered Sybil's warm greeting.

"Come in—come in!" she cried, joyfully; "my new uncle is here, and I want him to see you. We were talking about you, and expecting you."

She ran first, again heedless of the muslin, and entered the drawing-room with a joyful

"Here she is, uncle!—here she is!"

But unwilling, no doubt, to intrude on the interview of the two friends, Uncle Edward had left the room.

CHAPTER XIII.

"HE is gone!" cried Sybil, much disappointed —"what a shame!—but then I shall have you all to myself; let me look at you, darling, and do take off that horrid cloak."

With careless grace Miss Cains dropped her cloak on the nearest chair, and stood before her friend tall, stately, and, there could be no doubt about it, eminently handsome. Sybil looked at her admiringly, and well she might.

Miss Cains certainly was a very fine young woman. She was tall and rather large, perhaps, but she had a grand look, especially about the head and shoulders, which threw poor little Sybil in the shade. Grace was in all her motions, and with it something more. "She is set to music," Sybil said, enthusiastically, and so she was in a certain way. In her dwelt the harmony which belongs to perfectly formed, though somewhat

languid limbs, to unbroken health, and nerves of steel. Nothing startled, and very few things excited Miss Cains. She was not cold, and by no means apathetic; but hers was the tranquil warmth of autumn, rather than the fervid heat of spring. You read this in her handsome face, with its unvarying complexion of pure red and white, with its calm, though bright blue eyes, and its tranquil Greek features. A square chin, which somewhat marred the beauty of her countenance, also gave it the meaning of strength and will associated with the development of that feature. A pretty dimple in it redeemed the sternness of this rather Napoleonic outline, and a rosy smile contradicted it completely. To these attractions were added a genial face and a genial voice. No one took pleasure so readily as Miss Cains—to enjoy seemed her nature, and she looked one of those free, open creatures, whose charm it is to spread their own geniality around them. Something, indeed, she failed in. The delicacy and sensitiveness of Sybil's face were wanting in hers, and she had not Sybil's fine impassioned eyes; but the first impression was in her favour, and the first impression rules us all.

"Oh! how handsome you are," said Sybil, with sparkling eyes. "Blanche, you will avenge me. They have a cabal against me in this shabby little place, but they cannot have a cabal against you—you will take all their dancers away whether they like it or not."

"Why, you mischievous little thing, what have you been doing to have a cabal against you?—but you are going to a party, are you not?" she added, glancing expressively at Sybil's dress.

"I was going to one," replied Sybil, with bitter emphasis, "but there was a cabal against me."

In a few words she told her the whole story, adding, by way of conclusion,

"I would have gone all the same, if Uncle Edward would but have taken me."

"I fear I am the cause of Uncle Edward's leaving the room, am I not?" said Miss Cains.

"If he left, Blanche, it was that we might be free."

"Oh! I know I am nobody," carelessly said Blanche; "do not suppose I am hurt or offended. I expect no courtesy, I mean no marked courtesy, from any one."

Sybil's expressive countenance became full of concern.

"Pray don't go and think that," she said—"pray don't."

"My dear, I think nothing."

"Yes, you do, and to show you how mistaken you are, I shall go and fetch uncle directly."

"Not on my account, Sybil," said Miss Cains; but she spoke a little faintly, and Sybil, declaring she should not be five minutes away, went on her errand. She ran up quickly to Uncle Edward's room, and knocked at the door, but got no answer. And as no light came through the keyhole on the dark landing, it was plain he was not within. Sybil was turning away disappointed, when her aunt's door opened, and Miss Glyn appeared on the threshold in her flannel morning gown, and a light in her hand.

"Sybil!" she said, in amazement.

"Blanche has just arrived," breathlessly said Sybil, "and I am hunting for uncle, to introduce him to her."

"And the party?"

"I did not go. I had no one to take me; besides, there is a dreadful cabal against me. But I

wish I could find uncle. Have you heard him, aunt?"

"Sybil, go to your room and change your dress."

"I can't, aunt, Blanche is alone below."

"Do as I tell you. You have had one cold already—that is enough. I shall dress, and go and receive Miss Cains."

For her friend's sake Sybil thought it better to obey. Indeed the delay was not a long one; in a few minutes Sybil had changed her dress, and was running down the staircase.

"I cannot find him," she cried, opening the drawing-room door; but had scarcely time to say the words before she perceived her uncle standing near the fireplace, and talking to Miss Cains.

"Why, uncle, where have you been hiding?" cried Sybil, all amazement.

"I have not been hiding, my dear," he composedly replied, "but introducing myself to Miss Cains."

"But how did I miss you?" urged Sybil. "I cannot understand it."

"Nor I," he said, smiling.

"I must go and look for papa," said Sybil, starting up from her chair with the thought, "he does

not know you are here, or he would already have been to see you—he must be longing to know you."

She was already at the door of the room, when it opened and admitted Miss Glyn, who entered with much stateliness. Sybil greeted her with the ardent exclamation:

"Aunt, that is dear Blanche Cains at last!"

Miss Glyn bore the overwhelming news with much composure, and formally made Miss Cains welcome; then sat down, and looked hard at her. Sybil was rather disappointed at her aunt's coolness, but her hopes rose again as she heard her father's voice. He would appreciate Miss Cains. Mr. Kennedy entered the room as she came to this conclusion; again Sybil performed one of her ardent introductions. Mr. Kennedy went up to his young guest in a free and friendly manner, welcomed her to his house with great seeming cordiality, questioned her concerning her journey, the weather she had left behind her; and after standing talking with her for five minutes, he went and joined his brother, with whom he was soon in close converse. Sybil was disappointed. She had expected that her father, at least, would be charmed

with her friend; now, it was plain that Mr. Kennedy admired Miss Cains as a man ever admires a fine woman, but that beyond this he did not go. Sybil could find no trace of sympathy, or emotion, or dawning liking, in her father's countenance and manner, and it vexed her exceedingly.

If Miss Cains detected anything of the kind, she showed no resentment of it. She chatted gaily with Sybil, gave her all the school news, and looked as brilliant and fresh as if she had not had a long and fatiguing journey that day. Sybil, who vaguely felt that something was wanting to the reception of her friend, was bent on securing her admiration, at least, and asked her to sing, if she were not fatigued.

Miss Cains smiled.

"My dear," she said, "you know I am never fatigued; but then I only sing duets."

Sybil's face fell; she had a pretty voice, but she could not sing with Blanche Cains.

"Sybil, why don't you ask me?" whispered Uncle Edward, bending over her chair.

Sybil, who had no suspicion that her uncle could sing, was both charmed and surprised at the suggestion; but still doubting his efficiency, and

remembering that Blanche Cains could sing none but Italian music, she asked bluntly,

"Can you sing, uncle?"

Uncle Edward smiled.

"Yes, he could."

"Then I shall accompany you!" cried Sybil, all joy.

"Darling," said Miss Cains, "I like accompanying myself best."

"Then I shall listen," submissively said Sybil.

And so she did. She drew a low chair forward, and sitting upon it with her hands clasped on her knees, she listened, rapt in admiration, whilst Miss Cains and her uncle sang.

They both had fine voices, and both sang well, and in wonderful harmony. They took their audience by surprise. Miss Glyn, though compelled to admire, looked none the better pleased for it; but Mr. Kennedy, who was fond of music, was evidently charmed; and Sybil was in the seventh heavens.

"Oh! uncle, it was divine!" she cried, when he came back to her. "What a beautiful voice you have! but what a shame not to have let us hear it before."

"The merit lies all with Miss Cains, my dear."

But for once Sybil forgot to give the palm to her friend. Her uncle's voice was the finer of the two, and though she did not say so, even Blanche saw she thought it.

"Oh! papa, what a shame not to have told me about uncle's singing," she said reproachfully.

"My dear, Neddy's accomplishment is new to me—we all owe the knowledge of it to Miss Cains. But will she not favour us again?"

This time Miss Cains required no pressing. She sat down to the piano, and sang alone; to Sybil's surprise, and to her annoyance, she did not sing very well, not at least to advantage. So to make up for this, she whispered to her Uncle Edward,

"Is she not handsome?"

"Very; but how well you look to-night, Sybil! No wonder they had a cabal against you."

"Blanche will break the cabal," sagaciously replied Sybil; "look at her hair—is it not like sunshine?"

He looked from Miss Cains to Sybil, and all he said was,

"I cannot help thinking, Sybil, that you admire Miss Cains on speculation."

Sybil looked surprised and inquiring.

"Admiration becomes you so well. That is my meaning, my dear."

Miss Cains came up and resumed her seat, and Sybil could not utter the petulant reply her uncle's complimentary remark had suggested.

The whole family sat up late and had supper, and after supper, sat again, and one struck as Sybil and Miss Cains retired for the night. They first went to Sybil's room. With this dainty little bower Miss Cains seemed much smitten.

"Oh! you happy little thing!" she said, sinking down in a luxurious chair, "what a nest you have!"

Her look wandered over Sybil's pretty room, with its elegant and comfortable furniture, and all its dainty toys, and there was just a sigh, not of envy, but appreciation, as she uttered the words. Indeed, it was plain to an acute observer, that Miss Cains was no ascetic. To do her justice, she professed nothing of the kind. She had always loved her ease, and had never denied it. She was frankness itself in some things, though, like most of her slandered sex, there were plenty of things concerning which she could keep her own counsel.

That she had a failing for fine apparel, jewels, and luxurious furniture, she confessed freely. China and laces were her adoration. Her eyes sparkled when she spoke of them, and there was an eager yearning in her voice, or a languishing softness, both of which told of longing and desire.

"Shall we change rooms?" eagerly said Sybil. "I gave you Mrs. Mush's room, because it has a finer prospect than mine."

Blanche laughed.

"Yes, I remember—you were all for prospect and sky, and you fell in love with the Surrey hills, having nothing better; but it is like you, to want to give me your room. You are a queer little girl."

"But do take it, Blanche—do."

"No; and there's an end of it. But I say it again, you are a queer little girl. Now to think of your wearing that trashy thing upon you—your maid ought to know better."

"I have no maid; papa says I do not want one."

Miss Cains looked at her with compassion and contempt, and said emphatically,

"You little simpleton!"

"But, Blanche, I can do without one."

"Nonsense; you were not at all well-dressed in that white muslin."

"Uncle advised me to wear something light in texture," said Sybil.

"Oh! if he is your authority, I am mute," replied Blanche with mock gravity.

"How do you like him?" eagerly asked Sybil; "is he not handsome, and grand-looking."

"And red-haired," interrupted Blanche. "He is large, to be sure; and so you think him grand—you silly little thing!"

"Well, but how do you like him, and how do you like my father and Aunt Glyn."

"My dear," again interrupted her friend, "how I like them is very little to the purpose—I have come here resolved to like them, and think them delightful, were it only for your sake; but how *they* like me is the question."

"Well, of course they do like you," stoutly said Sybil.

"Do they, little goose? I caught your aunt looking at me and your father, and your uncle, too, and I can tell you exactly what they thought of your humble servant."

"Don't!" entreated Sybil.

"Yes, I will—the truth is the truth, and you know I am not afraid of her. Your aunt looked at me, and thought, 'She is very handsome, a great deal too showy for Sybil—silly thing to bring her, here.' Your father thought 'A fine girl, but large—I like small women.' And with this flattering comment he dismissed the subject of Blanche Cains. Your uncle—"

"Now, Blanche, that is unkind," interrupted Sybil, with tears in her eyes.

"My dear, it is true, and therefore cannot be unkind; but give me a kiss, and let's say no more on that subject."

"I am sure aunt and papa will both like you and uncle too," persisted Sybil fondly.

Blanche's blue eyes flashed.

"Your uncle, indeed!—why, Sybil, you do not mean to say you have not found him out yet, with his red hair and his green eyes, and his singing!"

Sybil was so amazed at this outburst, and at the tone in which it was uttered, that she remained dumb. Blanche laughed a little scornfully.

"I tell you, child," she said, "that your uncle is

a woman scorner. We are nothing in his eyes, my dear, but a set of pretty creatures made for God-like man's pleasure and amusement. Woe to the woman that man marries!"

"Oh! Blanche, you are quite wrong I assure you," said Sybil warmly. "You cannot imagine how good uncle is—and so kind to me, so very kind!" she added gratefully.

"Oh! of course he is kind to his niece," carelessly said Blanche.

"But he is really kind, Blanche, and really fond of me.

"Nonsense. Red-haired people are fond of number one—selfishness is the badge of the tribe."

Sybil got a little indignant.

"He is not so red as all that," she said half angrily; "and red or not, he is very handsome, almost as handsome as my father. It is not merely that he has good features; but there is something so sweet, and spirited, and good and manly in his countenance, that it tells you of a fine nature."

She spoke warmly, and coloured as she spoke. Blanche laughed, and drawing her on her knee kissed her heartily:

"You dear good little simpleton," she said, "you

are a simpleton; but I like you for it. It is like you to stand up for the absent friend, and defend him warmly, generously. It does one good to hear you, Sybil."

And she kissed her again, and, Sybil remembering how her uncle and her friend both praised and loved her for the one trait, felt puzzled, and almost sad. There was a vague revelation to her of a world where there is not much praise bestowed on the absent, and where the friend you profess to love is too often left undefended.

"Yes," resumed Miss Cains, "you are a good little thing, there is no doubt about that; but I must not keep you up all night, and so good night, or good morning."

"Oh! not yet," pleaded Sybil. "I have so many things to tell you. We are asked once for all to Mrs. Ronald's parties, and she gives one every fortnight, and so are you, for I told her I expected a friend soon, and she said my friend must go with me. And you must help me to break the cabal. Now, what shall we wear, Blanche, for I must get a new dress; I tore this in running out to see you."

"I shall not go to Mrs. Ronald's," drily said Blanche.

"Not go! Why so?"

"I have no dress to wear, and do not choose to buy one. The plain truth is, I cannot afford it."

"But *I* can," eagerly said Sybil; "my father gave me three hundred francs yesterday, and I did not spend it."

"You saved it for me!" cried Blanche, with a sudden flash in her blue eye.

Sybil turned crimson and stammered. Miss Cains took out her purse, and put two sovereigns on Sybil's table.

"You sent me that, and I would not affront you by returning it," she said quietly; "for of course I know how you meant it; but once for all, Sybil, I will have no such presents."

"Then you do not love me."

"Nonsense."

Tears stood in Sybil's eyes; but Blanche laughed and kissed her, and was obdurate. At length Sybil's tears and entreaties wrung a reluctant compromise from her. Blanche took back the money, and promised to provide herself with a blue tarletan dress, and Sybil was to have another like it, and both dresses were to be trimmed with white roses. It was four before the debate was over, and Sybil

having assured her friend she had better not cross the landing for fear of ghosts, Blanche laughingly consented to share her bed. This little white nest received both these fair birds, and a flounce kept them awake till five o'clock, after which they slept.

CHAPTER XIV.

LATE though she fell asleep, and early though she got up, Sybil was as fresh as a rose the next morning. So at least thought Uncle Edward, when he met her crossing the cloister.

"Whither so fast?" he said, stopping her.

"I am going for watercresses. Blanche is so fond of them, and I want to get her some myself."

"Pray, was it the fair Blanche who kept you up so late, Sybil?"

"How do you know we stayed up late, uncle?"

"I was in the counting-house, and saw the light in your window. I saw also two shadows moving behind the curtain."

"Yes, we had a good deal to say. But I am glad you admire her, uncle. I knew you would."

"I did not say I admired her; but I do say she will throw you in the shade."

"Then she will break up the cabal," gaily said

Sybil; "and you will come with us to the next party, uncle, and dance with her. Now, confess she is beautiful."

"Oh! she is a very fine young woman."

Sybil longed to tell her uncle he had but indifferent taste; but she thought it wiser to go back to her entreaty.

"Uncle, you know I want you to dance with Blanche."

"Do you, though?—and suppose I decline going to all parties?"

"No, dear old uncle, pray do not. She is a stranger, you know. Pray do promise to dance with her!"

"Oh! I shall require a great deal more of praying and coaxing than that to make me do it, I can tell you. 'Old uncle' is anything but an inducement, to begin with."

"You know what I mean when I say it."

"Just so; and do not like your meaning at all. My hair may not be the right colour, but it is not grey yet, Miss Kennedy."

"Your hair is beautiful hair," stoutly said Sybil; "and you will dance with Blanche, who will look lovely in blue."

"Oh! that is to be the colour, is it?—and what will you wear?"

"Blue—we are to be alike."

"Blue will not suit you, my dear."

"Oh! yes, it will; besides, we must be alike."

Did Uncle Edward guess why Sybil and Miss Cains should be alike? Perhaps he did, for he was one whom few things escaped. At all events, he softly laid his hand on Sybil's dark hair, and looked down in her face silently, but so kindly, that Sybil wondered in her heart at Blanche's unjust sentence. He a woman-scorner!—he selfish and unkind! Ah! no, surely—he was good among the good—a generous and noble man.

"Dear, good old Uncle Edward," she thought, looking up at him, and that with so expressive a countenance that it made him say,

"Blue will suit you, Sybil; and you need fear no rival if you will but look so. And now let us go for the watercresses."

"And will you really come with me?" joyfully cried Sybil—"how kind you are!"

"Very; I, too, have a weakness for watercresses."

They left the cloister, crossed the lower garden,

and went up into the grounds above. A little delving path led them ere long to a green shady region known as the "Cressonière." A spring, which helped to feed the river of Saint Vincent, flowed out from beneath a dark rock, crowned with wild roses and hawthorn, passed beneath a few rude stones which spanned it bridgewise, then spread into a wide shallow pool, around which grew a deep and irregular circle of tall trees. Verdure, shade, and silence marked this quiet spot. On the surface of the water floated a green field of watercresses, and where the water was deeper, and flowed over them, there spread a mirror dark and clear, in which the bending trees looked at themselves, and where every now and then appeared a patch of blue sky gently rippling along with the thin crystal. In the shade of the trees, spreading through the brushwood, ran little rills, fed by the central lake, and on their banks more watercresses grew thick and luxuriant.

"I like this place," said Sybil, sitting down on a mossy bank, when her lap was full. "You know that papa is the only watercress-grower in Saint Vincent, and could starve all these girls who would not let me have a partner."

"But you scorn that revenge, Sybil?"

"I do; but I like this place—it is so calm and still. Here there is no angry roaring of the sea, no boisterous wind—nothing but little breezes to whisper through the trees, and birds singing on their boughs—and I like these trees, uncle. They stand in a circle like sages in council, nodding their green heads in the sun, and not scorning the humble watercresses at their feet. I shall bring Blanche here, and we shall sit and sew together, and you will come and sit with us, uncle."

"Will the gracious Blanche like it?"

"Why should she not? You must admire her, uncle, and she must like you, and——"

Sybil paused, not daring to go on. Uncle Edward was sitting by her side; he looked in her face and smiled. Sybil blushed, but said resolutely:

"Well, I do mean it. I love you both, and I do mean it. Uncle, she is the dearest and the best girl living. When I had scarlatina at school, she nursed me like a sister of mercy. I never can forget that—never!"

"This is the merest nonsense," said Uncle

Edward, shaking his heavy hair a little impatiently—"here am I idling away my morning hours gathering watercresses, and listening to Miss Cains's praises. I wonder what brought, and what keeps me here, you little witch? But there is a curious spell about you—no one can deny that. You are quite capable of making me marry that friend of yours, whether I like it or not. Ay! and capable, too, of what would probably be much harder—of making her admire me."

Sybil's eyes sparkled, and she clapped her hands.

"Oh! how I should like it!" she cried.

"And it will actually soon be breakfast-time," he interrupted, rising; "and I have business at the mill, and the royal Blanche will waken and wonder where her maid-of-honour is all this time."

"So she will," cried Sybil, starting up. "Good morning, uncle."

She gave him a nod, and darted away. As she was hurrying through the cloister, Miss Glyn's voice, issuing from the open library window, summoned her within. Sybil obeyed the call, and dutifully bade her aunt good morning.

"Where have you been?" frigidly asked Miss Glyn.

"Gathering watercresses for breakfast."

"What was that gentleman saying to you a while ago in the cloister?"

"I suppose you mean uncle, aunt. Well, we were talking about Mrs. Ronald's party, and I was telling uncle that Blanche and I are to wear blue; he thinks blue will not suit me, but I am sure it will."

Miss Glyn looked very indignant. "That impostor" to talk to her niece on a matter of dress, and the colour that would suit, or the colour that would not suit her! And her foolish niece to be wearing blue, which would make her look hard and common, just because blue suited that upstart, Miss Cains!—it was all exasperating.

"Sybil, you are a fool!" she said, with so much bitterness, that Sybil looked and felt dismayed.

"I am amazed at your talking to that gentleman about what you are to wear, and your wearing blue, which does not, and never did, suit you, is the most absurd thing I ever heard of. Pray," she added, with considerable asperity, "what made you bring Miss Cains here, and what

makes you take her to Mrs. Ronald's party? Miss Cains is a great deal more effective than you are, and will throw you in the shade; and it will do her no sort of good, whilst it will do you considerable harm. I wish to see you admired, and I do not see the necessity of providing yourself with a rival. I repeat it, it will do Miss Cains no sort of good, and it will injure you."

These remarks were probably dictated by the kindest motives, but Sybil took them very ill. She became crimson, and looked so hot and indignant, that her father, who saw her through the door she had left open, entered the room to ask "What is the matter?"

"The matter is this," replied Sybil vehemently, "that aunt blames me for having brought poor dear Blanche here. She says she will take all my admirers away, and she scolds me for wearing blue, and for telling uncle about it."

Now, if Miss Glyn's remarks had displeased Sybil, they thoroughly offended Sybil's father.

"My dear Mary," he said, "how can you put such ideas into the girl's head? The idea of that Miss Cains, who has not a penny, robbing Sybil of her admirers, is ridiculous. Nor can I imagine

that, were their fortunes equal, my little Sybil need care a pin. Surely no one would think of preferring to her that big, fair, fat, girl——"

"Oh, but she is lovely," interrupted Sybil, little pleased to be so defended.

"My dear, our tastes differ. I do not admire her. She is a fine woman, and she has splendid teeth, and laughs a good deal to show them. There —there, I will say no more, but I repeat it, the idea of rivalry between you is absurd. As to blue, wear it if you like; and," he added, turning once more to Miss Glyn, "if Sybil does consult her uncle on a question of dress, you need not wonder, Mary, it was I who referred her to him whilst you were away."

"I am much obliged to you for the lecture you have read me," said Miss Glyn rising; "and I do admire, James, the teaching you give your child. If she does not become the vainest girl in Ireland, it will be no fault of yours. I tell her what I think, that Miss Cains, who is much handsomer than she is, can eclipse her; and that this Miss Cains, whom I suspect to be both false and artful, will do so, I have no doubt; but I wash my hands of this once for all, and Sybil may wear black or

yellow, or a Scotch plaid, if she pleases, and get any gentleman to fix the height of her flounces, for all I shall care, or meddle, from this day forth."

With this dignified speech, by which she meant to cut up both father and daughter, Miss Glyn rose, and deliberately left the room.

Mr. Kennedy laughed gaily, but Sybil looked ready to cry.

"Never mind, Pussy," he said. "I know what you feel most is the 'false and artful.' But never mind; here is more money to get you a blue dress, since blue it must be; and you will be the prettiest girl in the room, whatever you wear."

With this kind speech, and a kiss and some gold pieces, Mr. Kennedy left his daughter; but Sybil's heart was sore. Blanche had begun the work, and everyone seemed bent on completing it. These four people were all engaged in fault-finding, suspecting and sneering at each other. It was dreadful, and very tiresome. Oh! if her uncle would only not be giving his indirect hits at dear Blanche—if dear Blanche would only spare him, and not call him red-haired, and a woman-scorner —if aunt would not attribute such bad designs to

her dear friend—and if her good kind father would only not call Blanche a big, fat, fair girl, and accuse her of showing her teeth! Oh, why would they not all love and admire Blanche, and why would not Blanche believe in their love and admiration? It was hard, and so cruel! Moreover, all little Sybil's match-making plans were sadly down. She was afraid, she was, her uncle and her friend would never fall in love with each other.

She was quite pensive when she went in search of Denise to give her the watercresses. She found her in the kitchen garden with Narcisse. Denise standing lingering to her heart's delight, and Narcisse talking with mysterious emphasis.

"I told him to be off with himself," said Narcisse, loftily. "I told him he was an oyster."

Denise looked dismayed.

"You should not," she said. "You should not, Narcisse."

"But he is an oyster," persisted Narcisse. "Why did he not go for the surgeon at once?"

On hearing the word surgeon, Sybil inquired if there had been an accident.

"There has," emphatically said Narcisse; "and instead of going for a surgeon they bound up his wrist."

"Whose wrist, Narcisse?"

"Monsieur de Renneville's; he sprained his wrist as he was going to Madame Ronald's party, and his man-servant bound it up, instead of going for a surgeon."

"And did he go to the party?" asked Sybil, turning crimson.

Narcisse, who was more emphatic than polite, asked how Monsieur de Renneville could go to the party with his wrist bound up; and by the tone in which he put the question, he evidently thought Sybil an oyster for the time being. But Sybil did not heed him; she walked away strangely fluttered. She saw it all now. It was Monsieur de Renneville who had called on Madame de Lonville, and given that lady the warning she had conveyed to Sybil. She forgot the errand that brought her to the kitchen-garden, and Blanche and the watercresses, and she only thought "how kind." A little smart tap on her shoulder roused her from this fit of abstraction. She turned round, and saw Blanche Cains smiling at her.

"Well, Penserosa," she said gaily, "what musing fit is on you now?—Mr. Smith, eh?"

"No, no, indeed—not Mr. Smith."

"By the way, what of him? When is he going to turn up again? I feel quite inquisitive about him, and especially desirous of seeing him, and of hearing that nonaspirate and too aspirate H, which roused your ire."

"I hear nothing about him now."

"Was it about him your uncle went away?"

"Uncle did not tell me what he went away for."

"Are you sure he went away at all? My belief is that he and Mr. Smith were locked up all the time in some garret of this old nunnery, and had it out between them."

Miss Cains spoke very deliberately, and again with that dislike of Uncle Edward which Sybil had noticed the night before. "I suppose I must give up all thought of their marrying," she thought with a sigh, which did not escape the quick ear of Blanche Cains.

"For whom is that?" she asked; "for Green-eyes or for Mr. Smith?"

"For neither. One I love, the other I detest!"

"Yes; but which?"

"You know, Blanche."

"I know I am dying to hear something about Mr. Smith, and can get nothing out of you."

Something did rise to Sybil's lips, for she remembered the letter she had half-read, but she remembered too that her uncle had bid her keep a seal upon her lips, and she only laughed and shook her head.

"Now, my dear, I give you fair warning," said Blanche Cains, solemnly; "I am here in clover, pretty much as Eve was in Paradise, for Miss Blunt has given me unlimited leave of absence, and I must complete the likeness by being up to mischief. The tree of knowledge is here, with a secret, the forbidden fruit growing upon it, and that tempting serpent we all carry within us declares it is delicious. Therefore, as I said, I give you fair warning. I shall pump your servants, and ferret over the house, and hunt up evidence, till I know all about Mr. Smith."

"And then you will share the apple with me and tell me?"

"No," resolutely said Miss Cains; "Adam was a sneak, who threw all the blame on poor Eve.

She should have sinned alone, and left him in Paradise; and, manlike, he would have forgotten her for another Eve."

Miss Cains spoke with some bitterness. Sybil looked at her earnestly.

"You have had some trouble, Blanche," she said.

"You think my Adam has forsaken me, do you? My dear, I have none, and never had any. I have told you so again and again. I am twenty-five, as poor as Job, and I look expensive; no man has yet been found daring enough to undertake me. And after all I cannot blame them," candidly said Miss Cains. "I would not marry a poor man."

"Blanche! if you liked him?"

"My dear, I would not like him. Remember, you have the theory of poverty, and I have the bitter practice. It is cruel, it is selfish in a poor girl to marry a poor man. It is dragging him down to life-long sorrow. But, oh! you lucky little girl, what a place is this Saint Vincent! What fruit you must have here, and flowers, and vegetables, and poultry—a very land of Goshen!"

"You are fond of cauliflowers, I know," said Sybil, eagerly.

"My dear, I adore them; and peas, and salad, and a young chicken, and a dish of strawberries and cream."

"Peas are not in," said Sybil, with a sigh; "but we have plenty of other good things. Come and take what you like for dinner."

Miss Cains was quite willing, and made a most liberal and judicious selection. When it was over she said again that Saint Vincent was a land of Goshen; and Sybil, giving her a fond kiss, wished ardently they could live and die together in Saint Vincent.

CHAPTER XV.

IT is all very well to declare that we will meddle no more in this matter, that we have had enough of it, that we wash our hands of it henceforth, &c., the difficulty is to keep to such a resolve, and so Miss Glyn soon found. The free-and-easy footing on which Miss Cains established herself at Saint Vincent exasperated her; the doubtful relationship of Uncle Edward was to her the very height of iniquity; and Mr. Kennedy's cool assumption of undivided authority in his own house, and in his own concerns, provoked her the more, that she knew not how to resent it. For all that, it only required so trifling a thing as an interview with Madame de Lonville to upset all Miss Glyn's dignified resolves.

Mrs. Ronald was an old friend of Miss Glyn's, and at this lady's house she and Madame de Lonville had become acquainted within the last few

days. But the acquaintance was a brief one at the best. Miss Glyn had not asked Madame de Lonville to call upon her, and unmitigated surprise appeared in her countenance as Denise announced this unexpected visitor. It so happened that Miss Glyn was alone, for the two friends were in the garden, so she requested Denise to show the lady into the drawing-room, to which she forthwith repaired, infusing a double amount of stateliness in her manner. On seeing her enter, Madame de Lonville rose and came forward. A stout, round-faced lady, with a childish smile and a keen green eye, was Madame de Lonville. She waddled up to Miss Glyn, and was considerably out of breath by the time she reached that lady.

"Do not mind it," she said, as if deprecating Miss Glyn's interference with her breathless condition; "I am used to it."

She dropped down in a chair as she spoke, and smiled her vacant childish smile up in Miss Glyn's face.

"Now, you know I have not come to see you," she said, with engaging candour; "I come upon business."

This intimation caused Miss Glyn no surprise.

She knew through Mrs. Ronald that Madame de Lonville's finger was ever in some pie or other. She had either tickets for a charitable lottery to dispose of, or subscriptions for some excellent purpose to collect, or some first-rate bargain to propose to the large circle of her friends. Some anonymous lady had a diamond ring too many, or some unknown gentleman a capital cask of wine to part with, or even some mysterious friend of the needy was willing to lend some thousand francs at so much per cent. on good security.

"Yes, I come upon business," repeated Madame de Lonville; "and what do you think that business is?" Without waiting for Miss Glyn's reply, she sank her voice to a whisper, and speaking behind her hand, she added, "Matrimonial."

Now, it so happened that when she called on Mrs. Ronald, Miss Glyn had informed that lady she wished to see Sybil speedily and well married before she left Saint Vincent, for she feelingly added, "I cannot trust the child to her father, you know."

Madame de Lonville was present when the remark was uttered, and treasured it up. For she sometimes indulged in the matrimonial pie. She

was ever ready, good soul, to help and unite any fond pair in the holy bonds of wedlock. In England, the girl who wants to marry, hunts for herself; or the man who wants a wife, casts his eye about him, and, sultan-like, picks out the one that suits him, thinks over it, and finally tells her his mind. In France, matters are rarely managed so. The points of marriageable young ladies are well known to their friends, and frequently discussed in society. So much money down, so much more coming in, blue eyes, dark hair, a sweet temper, accomplishments, &c., &c. On this nomenclature, single gentlemen, of whom a similar account is kept and given, keep themselves ready to fall in love, get introduced to the fair damsel, and from that first interview both parties judge how far it is advisable to meet again. It is a formidable ordeal is that first interview; love sometimes springs from it, and often dislike, disgust, and aversion. Then are flattering descriptions tested, and blue eyes, dark hair, and gentlemanlike manners are held at their true worth. Little thanks do the De Lonville sisterhood often get for their pains—but they are not disheartened; the wish of promoting the happiness of their species, the hope of more sub-

stantial rewards, sustain them; but that is nothing to our present purpose.

"Now let us be open," engagingly said Madame de Lonville—"I am quite open, as you see. You have got a charming niece, whom you wish to see well and happily married."

"What do you call well and happily married?" slowly asked Miss Glyn.

"I call a girl well and happily married who gets a handsome, brave, and spirited, and yet most moral and exemplary nobleman."

"Poor?" drily said Miss Glyn.

"Well, not rich, of course," replied Madame de Lonville; "when they are rich, they do not go seeking for wives, poor dears!—they have to run away from them."

Miss Glyn seemed to muse. At length she spoke:

"I certainly do wish to see my niece well and happily married," she said, gravely; "but I must know more of the young man before I give you even a doubtful answer."

"Dear me!—I came for that," said Madame de Lonville, with a sudden lighting up of her keen green eye. "I heard you speak on that subject at

Mrs. Ronald's, so I came for that. Perhaps you would rather question me—I shall answer."

"Then be so good as to tell me his name."

"Why, no, you see, I cannot do that just yet. You are so very much on your guard that I must not be too open. But it is a good name, and he is a count—a real count of the old *noblesse*. You would like to see your dear little niece a countess?" she coaxingly added.

Miss Glyn's only reply was to put another question.

"How old is he?"

"Thirty, but does not look more than twenty-five," glibly replied Madame de Lonville.

"He is too old for Sybil, then—a great deal too old."

"Excuse me, I think his being thirty such an advantage! He has sown all his wild oats, as your friend Mrs. Ronald would say."

Miss Glyn was anything but pleased with this remark; her brown eyes flashed, and she drew up her spare figure with considerable dignity.

"Madame," she said, gravely, "I disapprove of a man having any wild oats to sow."

"Ah!" sighed Madame de Lonville, "so do I,

Miss Glyn; but it is a dreadful thing when it comes after marriage, as it did with me, Miss Glyn. It half killed me—I never got back my breath."

"And that count, whoever he may be," continued Miss Glyn, "is too old, and not moral enough for my niece."

"Dear me!—I have not spoken against his morality, have I?" cried Madame de Lonville; "he is a most exemplary young man, lives with his mother in an old château, has a little shooting now and then, never touches a card, never swears, goes to church twice every Sunday, his mother is a saint—in short, he is a most pious, well-conducted young nobleman."

"You spoke of his wild oats?" said Miss Glyn, still suspicious.

"My dear madam, I spoke of his being thirty—as to his wild oats, I do not know—on my word, I do not know that he ever had any."

She spoke so emphatically, that Miss Glyn was pacified, and the cross-examination was resumed. After the years of the anonymous count came his looks. He proved to be tall, gentlemanlike, and fair. It also appeared that he wore whiskers, and

was adorned with a moustache—that he had blue eyes, a straight nose, and very good teeth. Then his accomplishments were discussed. He was a good linguist, said Madame de Lonville, and played on the fiddle. Then he had the sweetest temper, and the noblest heart—in short, so good a young man had never made a happy girl a countess since counts began and marriage-knots were tied.

"Has he good health?" asked Miss Glyn—"tall and fair, I suspect he is consumptive, Madame de Lonville."

"Consumptive!" almost screamed Madame de Lonville—"I do not know such lungs as he has. Every one of the Rennevilles—there, the name has slipped out!—dies of old age—mere old age. There is neither gout, nor asthma, nor liver complaint, nor rheumatism, in the whole generation."

"But he is poor," said Miss Glyn.

"Why, yes, he is."

"Very poor."

"My dear madam, I will be quite open with you. I believe he has something like four thousand francs a year."

"A hundred and sixty pounds English—and pray how much would he expect?"

"Why, something like two hundred thousand francs down, and as much later."

"That is to say, sixteen thousand pounds English—a cool gentleman. No, no, that will never do."

Madame de Lonville looked disconcerted and disappointed. What a pity to throw away such an opportunity, it might never come back, you know; a real count—and surely Mademoiselle Kennedy had or would have the money.

"My niece has more, and will have more," said Miss Glyn with some pride, "but Count André de Renneville—I have heard the name before—is too poor for her."

"He has an uncle," reluctantly said Madame de Lonville, "who might leave him something."

"But he also has a mother, who would expect to live with him, and I cannot allow that."

"Oh, dear me! I forgot to tell you that his mother is to stay in the château."

"And where, then, is he to live?" sharply asked Miss Glyn.

"With his wife."

"And on his wife. No, madam, that will not

do. My niece's money shall not help to keep a count in idleness. Idle husbands are bad husbands, and I wish her to be a happy woman. That is of far more importance than being a countess."

"But why should she not be a happy countess?" persisted Madame de Lonville—"why should he live upon his wife and be idle? He would like a busy life of all things, if he had but capital to start with."

Now capital was one of Miss Glyn's hobbies. She was sure that with capital you could do anything. She had capital, but she was a woman; a vision of a docile nephew, who would adopt and work on her ideas, dawned before her, and softened her so far that she said "she would see this young man."

"And if you will speak to Mr. Kennedy——"

"There is no need to do that; I must be satisfied first," interrupted Miss Glyn. "Later," she added with a certain condescension of manner, "will do for Mr. Kennedy. In the meanwhile, I must see this young man."

Madame de Lonville wagged her fat head with a roguish look.

"He is to be at Mrs. Ronald's ball," she whispered.

And thus came to naught Miss Glyn's stern resolve of washing her hands of Mr. Kennedy's daughter, and letting Sybil wear a plaid dress if she pleased. Indeed, so far was she from such philosophic indifference, that her very first act, after Madame de Lonville had left her, was to order the carriage and drive off to Saint Vincent, for the express purpose of questioning Mrs. Ronald. She found her surrounded by visitors, whom she heroically sat out.

"I am so glad you stayed," eagerly said Mrs. Ronald, as soon as they were alone. "I have found the very husband you want for Sybil."

"Indeed!"

"Yes. A most delightful young man: a count, too, of ancient family."

"Count André de Renneville?" suggested Miss Glyn.

"Why, how could you guess?"

"Madame de Lonville has just called and proposed the match to me."

Mrs. Ronald was silent awhile, then she said with much feeling,

"I cannot do without Madame de Lonville, or rather I dare not offend her, and she presumes upon it. But really it is too bad of her to go and forestall me in this case. I am quite hurt, I am, Miss Glyn."

Miss Glyn listened to her lament with great composure; then, when she ceased, inquired into Count André de Renneville's character and circumstances. Mrs. Ronald's account tallied so completely with Madame de Lonville's—it would have lessened Miss Glyn's satisfaction had she known that Madame de Lonville was Mrs. Ronald's authority—that she went home in high spirits.

But Miss Glyn was eminently a prudent person. She now determined in her own mind that she would see this young man, weigh him well, turn him over, ascertain how far he would be equal to the management of capital, then speak to her brother-in-law, and propose that he should give him Sybil, and take him into partnership. These preliminaries being settled, Sybil would be consulted. Now it so happened, that this wise and prudent course had to be reversed. Madame de Lonville called the next day with the information that Count André de Renneville was on the eve

of a matrimonial expedition to Paris, and that unless he received some definite encouragement, he could not afford Miss Glyn more than one interview. He asked for nothing like a promise; but he must feel that he was not wholly unacceptable to the young lady, not liable, in short, to be rejected at the eleventh hour by that potentate from whose decisions there was no appeal, Sybil's heart, or he would excuse himself from going to Mrs. Ronald's party, and proceed to Paris at once. Miss Glyn sharply asked how this prudent gentleman could know that Sybil would suit him; but with a knowing wag Madame de Lonville replied that there was no doubt on that head. The Count had seen Miss Kennedy, and was fascinated by her grace and beauty. Miss Glyn said she must take time to consider so weighty a matter; but promised to give Madame de Lonville a definite answer before the day of the party.

Severe were Miss Glyn's mental struggles before her mind was finally make up. At length she yielded to the force of circumstances, and sent Madame de Lonville the promised token. But she so far adhered to her original plan, that she did not open her lips to Mr. Kennedy on the subject,

and resolved not to speak to Sybil herself, until she had come to some sort of opinion concerning Count de Renneville. This she would do on the evening of the party; if her opinion was favourable, she would let Sybil into the secret; if, on the contrary, it was not so, she would be silent, and plainly tell Madame de Lonville that the young man would never do for her niece.

CHAPTER XVI.

LITTLE did Sybil suspect her aunt's intended kindness. She now and then wondered, indeed, if she should see Count André de Renneville at Mrs. Ronald's; and now and then, too, she gave the grey towers of Raymond's manor a pensive look; but these were only passing clouds across the summer sky of her thoughts. Sybil had cared too little about herself as yet, to think much of such matters. She was also greatly wrapt up just then in the concerns of a poor woman, the tenant of a wretched hovel on Mr. Kennedy's land. This cabin, mere mud with a thatched roof, he wished to pull down; he offered his tenant a better home for the same money, but Jeanne had lived and grown old in this miserable abode, and she loved it with the blind passionate love of a wild thing for its lair. Arguments availed not, she moaned and

lamented, till Sybil, moved to pity, pleaded her cause, and finally won it by sheer importunity.

"You are a little simpleton, Pussy," said Mr. Kennedy; "the woman will die of rheumatism there; but have your way both of you—you may go and tell her that she can stay in her mud castle as long as she pleases."

This was an errand after Sybil's own heart, and she ran and told Blanche "her luck," as she called it, and it was agreed they would both go and convey the joyful tidings to the widow. But a violent headache would not allow Miss Cains to fulfil her part of the contract. She said it would be better as the day wore on, and spent the morning in her room; but when Sybil sought her again, and fondly asked:

"How is your headache, darling?"

Though Blanche Cains raised her head, and answered "better," her looks belied her words.

"No, no, it is not better," said Sybil, full of concern, "and you must not come out in this hot sun. I will not let you."

"Oh! pray do," urged Blanche—"I do feel as if the air would do me good."

"It is not air is out now, but heat. You must

stay within; I shall come back all the sooner if I go alone."

Blanche smiled and yielded, but she asked which road Sybil would take, that she might go and meet her.

"I shall come back by the pines," said Sybil. "Shall I sit and wait for you there?"

"Do; I dearly like that spot."

"And so do I," said Sybil, her eyes sparkling. "I cannot tell you what I feel, Blanche, when I sit beneath those pine-trees, and hear the sea breaking on the shore. It is fine, is it not?"

"It is grand, my dear," replied Blanche, with gentle mockery.

"Ah! you are quizzing—well, then, why do you like it?"

"Because I dearly like the scent of the pine-trees, my dear—for no other reason. If I could have them in this room, and the sea ten miles off, I should like it all the better. I hate that old moaning sea."

She spoke so pettishly, that it was Sybil's turn to laugh.

"Little the sea cares for your hatred, my dear,"

she said, gaily; "it will moan, as you say, or roar even, whether you like it or not."

"Well, but why does it make me sick?" resentfully asked Miss Cains—"I could endure it but for that. I would not kill a fly if it did not hurt me; but——" she did not go on, but laughed.

"But what?" asked Sybil.

"Nothing—I was going to talk nonsense; but my plain meaning is, I must not be bored, or worried, or balked—it changes my nature," she added, with a slight yawn; "and so I do hate the sea, and would dry it up if I could."

"Hate away," gaily said Sybil, "provided you don't hate me."

"Hate you, my pet?" softly said Miss Cains, looking at her with fond eyes—"hate you, who, I do believe, would make a cushion of yourself if I wanted one? Why, that would be monstrous, Sybil!"

"Ah! but suppose I bore, or wrong, or balk you?" suggested Sybil, gravely.

Miss Cains laughed, and shook her handsome head.

"You can't bore or wrong me," she replied,

"because I love you; and you can't balk me, because you love me."

"Is your head better?" cried Sybil, eagerly—"you look quite well again."

"My dear, it is worse," replied Miss Cains, with a sigh; "the truth is, talking does not improve it."

"Oh! how selfish I am!" said Sybil, full of remorse. "I must go at once; but do you think you ought to come and meet me?"

"Yes; I feel sure the scent of those trees will do me good, so pray wait for me."

Sybil promised to do so, and hurried away on her errand. Miss Cains went with her to the end of the garden, and Sybil, looking round, saw her standing at the head of the stone steps, till a clump of trees hid each from the other's view. Sybil went straight on for the pine-trees, then suddenly it occurred to her that this was the longest route, and that she would reach her goal more quickly if she went down by the mill.

Sybil did not like that part of her father's demesnes, and seldom took it; for up the stream, beyond the watercresses, there grew a small wood, which she must now cross, and which she ever shunned. It is not always on her vastest scenes

that Nature bestows her deepest significance. A beetling crag, a sweep of shore, a line of heath, are often more impressive than mountain, ocean, or desert, in all their magnitude. Many an Alpine solitude is not so grand as some bleak and narrow valley; many a forest has not so dark and mysterious a meaning as this little wood, which Sybil disliked and almost feared. Though so small that in a wider landscape it would not have looked more than a clump of trees, it was strangely dark and melancholy. Sybil was a child of life and light, and hated its oppressive gloom. A sense of awe now stole over her as she entered the silent place.

The tall trees grew close and high. Beneath their shade flowed the dark river. A cold wind blew above, and passed like a chill breath through the nodding boughs. Everywhere in the damp earth ferns grew high and green. If birds ever haunted this gloomy spot they were silent now. No love song nor joyful cry was heard here—nothing but the low rush of the brown water in its dark bed. Surely some Druid priestess had dwelt here of old?—surely this was the very spot for the rites of a dark and pitiless faith?

"I think I shall turn back," thought Sybil. Suddenly she heard a step behind her, then her name was uttered, and, looking round quickly, she saw her uncle Edward.

"Oh! I am so glad," she said with a sigh of relief; "I was getting frightened here."

"Frightened, Sybil!" he laughed.

"Uncle, it is so gloomy that it sends a chill through one's heart."

"It is fine, Sybil, very fine!"

"I think it dreadful."

He did not answer, he did not seem to hear her. His eager eyes were scanning every dark nook as if in search of something.

"Are you looking for serpents?" uneasily asked Sybil.

"Serpents, Sybil!—there are none here. You don't suppose that Saint Patrick, a native of these parts, would have allowed them?"

"Well, then, there ought to be serpents here," impatiently said Sybil; "this looks the very spot for treason and perfidy."

"Child, do not let your imagination carry you away so. Around these few trees lies an arid, sunburnt waste. Moreover, cut one down, and

the sky looks in, and the sun scorches up these damp-loving ferns, and shows you the pebbly bottom of the river—and the character of the place is gone. But since you dislike it so much, what brings you here, Sybil?"

"I am going to Jeanne's."

"So far alone?"

And he looked rather surprised, and scarcely pleased.

"Blanche could not come with me. Poor dear Blanche! she has such dreadful headaches! It makes me wretched to see her in such pain."

"Nonsense, Sybil, Miss Cains must bear with her headaches."

He spoke impatiently, and Sybil thought unfeelingly.

"But it is a dreadful headache," she insisted, reddening. "It began this morning. She could scarcely keep her eyes open. I bathed her forehead with eau-de-Cologne ever so long, but though she allowed it so patiently, it was of no use."

"Patiently! Pray where was the patience in letting your little kind hands pour out upon her that scent she doats on—to use her own expressive phrase."

"Don't be so unjust, uncle. She only did it to please me. And she is so unselfish. She knew I liked going to Jeanne's, and she would not let me stay with her. Now, that was kind."

"Very," he drily said.

"And I must go, for I am to wait for her at the Pines. Good-bye, uncle."

"No, do not—stay just a few minutes with me, Sybil. Sit down on that bank by me. You do not object?"

"No," replied Sybil, a little surprised.

She sat down as he spoke, and he half sat, half stretched himself by her side. She thought he had something to say to her, but he only looked at her intently, his chin resting on the palm of his hand, his eyes fastened on her face. Sybil was going to question him, when he spoke.

"Sybil," he said, "did you ever in your life utter a falsehood—tell a lie, in short? I know I have no right to put the question, for even a father confessor must hear and not ask; and yet, Sybil, do answer me. Did you ever do it?"

"Well, uncle, I will tell you, because I am proud, and it will humble me—I did."

He looked disappointed.

"You, too, Sybil," he said in a tone of regret. "Ah! what a pity!"

"Yes," returned Sybil, reddening, "but it made me very miserable, uncle; and yet," she added with much contrition, "I did it twice."

"Twice," he echoed; "you actually did it twice, and some time back, I suppose?"

"Years," replied Sybil.

"Two falsehoods in a lifetime," he repeated very gently. "Poor little sinner, but you will never utter a third, will you?"

"Never, I hope," she warmly replied.

"Do not, Sybil," he said with some passion—"do not. Let truth be your worship. There is nothing like her—nothing; we all long for and adore her; the meanest, the vilest, thirst for her too, selfishly, of course, but still ardently; for who would be deceived, and who does not scorn deceit, though himself a deceiver? You have never read Spenser, Sybil? Well, I have; and I remember Una, my second love; and, like all second loves, the purest and the best."

"And who was the first?" asked Sybil, gravely.

"Cinderella—dear, darling little Cinderella; but you see that was pity; now Una was both pity

and adoration. Talking thus with you, I remember how she came to the 'secret shadow;' maybe a spot not unlike this—a spot where treason and perfidy look congenial, as you say. But Heavenly Una laid her stole aside, her angel's face,

> 'As the great eye of Heaven shined bright,
> And made a sunshine in the shady place.'"

"Then I wish she were here," saucily interrupted Sybil. "I should like to see a ray of sunshine."

"She is here, Sybil—I see her."

"Where, then?"

"With the mind's eye."

Sybil laughed.

"I almost thought you meant me," she said, gaily.

"Mean you indeed! You vain little thing! Why, child, have you not prevaricated twice? It is quite dreadful to think of, especially in this world of ours, where men brave and strong can never utter a falsehood, and where truth dwells on the lips of young and beautiful women."

"Why, uncle, how strangely you do talk!" said Sybil.

He laughed and rose.

"It is this place," he said; "you are right,

Sybil, it has a chill, unhealthy look, and I suppose suggests morbid thoughts. Let us go out into the sunshine."

He walked with her to the limit of the trees, but when they reached it he stood still, evidently not meaning to go any further.

"You will not come with me?" she said, coaxingly.

"I cannot. Poor little Una, do not look so disappointed. I am not good enough to go with you. I must go back to that deceitful wood, and try my luck there. Perhaps I shall find some rare pearl after all—or maybe encounter a green dragon, or catch Melusina bathing in that black-looking water."

"Uncle," again said Sybil, "how strangely you talk!"

"Well, I believe I do," he replied, after a brief pause; "but you see, there are hidden griefs in every life which must break forth every now and then, and just now I am wading knee-deep through the very waters of bitterness. I am sick of it, Sybil, frightfully sick of it."

His eyes flashed, and he bit his lip. Suppressed passion, disgust, and anger were in his aspect.

Sybil laid her hand upon his arm, and said, very earnestly,

"Uncle, can I do nothing for you?"

"You!" he replied, his features suddenly relaxing into a kind smile; "you little thing, whom it saddens one to see going forth, all unarmed as you are, into a world of snares and pitfalls; you do anything for one who would like to do so much, and can do so little for you! A little while more, and your path and mine must part; and, alas! I know this world is not Fairyland, and that roaring lions oftener devour poor Una than they lick her feet, and keep watch and ward over the sleeping virgin. I wish I were your father, my little girl; if I were, I wonder what harm could come near you?"

"My father will let no harm come near me," jealously said Sybil.

"Not if he knows its existence; but what if he thinks harm a good?"

"Uncle, you should not talk so, it is wrong—quite wrong."

Sybil's eyes sparkled with indignation, but he only smiled and seemed rather pleased to have vexed her.

"I like to see you so, Sybil," he said, gaily; "it gives me comfort for the future. You are a brave, ay, and a resentful Irish girl. You trust entirely, but woe be to those who wrong or deceive you! And now good-bye, Sybil; make up for lost time, and do not keep your dear Miss Cains waiting."

He turned back into the wood, and Sybil walked along the path that led through the moor in silent but great indignation, at the ironical tone with which her uncle Edward had uttered the last words.

CHAPTER XVII.

SYBIL'S wrath cooled as she went on. It was much weaker when she reached Jeanne's cabin; and there it subsided entirely, for the door of the hut was fast, and there was no one within. Sybil sat down to rest awhile. The river here flowed into a sluggish pool. Yellow rocks, belonging to the neighbouring cliffs, and baked by the sun, were piled behind the cabin, and had scattered their fragments on the banks of the stream. Here sun and light abounded; but here ceased the freshness and verdure of earth. Here began a nature other than that of the poet's, yet not without its own beauty, contrasts, and harmonies. A more arid waste never greeted traveller's eye in the sands of Africa. And this was the spot which it was heartbreaking to leave, which it was such happiness to remain in.

"Poor thing!" thought Sybil. "I am so sorry

there is no one I can tell the news to. What a pity that she must wait another day! I am glad now dear Blanche did not come. She would have been so disappointed."

And as it was plain that Jeanne's cabin was deserted for the day, Sybil, after resting awhile, rose and bent her steps homeward. This time she took the longer and shadier route, and soon found herself in the pine-tree plantation—wood or forest it could not be called—which skirted the seashore.

Oh! how Sybil liked that spot. How she liked that long low glimpse of sea, and golden west passing behind the trees, and that surge breaking in strange music on the smooth sand of the shore! How she liked that deep calm gloom above her head, and that soft carpet under her feet, and that sweet penetrating odour which filled the air! She walked on, her heart beating with pleasure, her whole being thrilled with secret delight, till she reached the trysting place. There she sat and again rested, for Miss Cains, not expecting her so soon, had not yet made her appearance.

Thought was the food of Sybil's life, young and inexperienced, and, indeed, ignorant of many things though she was. As she now sat waiting

for Miss Cains, she sat and thought not of her, however, but of her Uncle Edward. Sybil was trusting, because she herself was true; but there is a calm and happy faith which, though it serves to blind, does not always exclude penetration. Sybil wore a bandage over her eyes when she loved; but when her affection was not called into jeopardy, when she could see and not doubt, Sybil was keen-sighted enough, and could cast a deep and searching look, in matters that seemed beyond her years, and were certainly beyond her experience. Her uncle appeared to her under a new aspect, and Sybil was quick in apprehending its meaning. He had called himself Prose to her, and prose he was in some things. He had a clear, firm mind, which abhorred all vagueness, as matter was said to abhor the vacuum of the old philosophers. He was severe, and sometimes cynical in his censure of this world's falsehoods and assumptions; but he was not heartless. No, Sybil had seen it that day by his quivering lip and his troubled eye—pain had her hold upon him, too, that cruel grasp, which she willingly foregoes from none of her mortal children. He could suffer keenly, Sybil was sure of it now; and whatever

the cause of that suffering might be, feeling, strong and deep, was its source. The cold, the callous, have no such secret anguish to hide, as he had half betrayed to her that morning. They need never break out into those half-bitter, half-passionate ejaculations, which for the first time had passed his lips in Sybil's hearing. Ay, he was very different from what he had seemed—Sybil was very sure of it now. Strong though he looked, a tender heart lay hidden beneath that defiant smile.

There is strange fascination in the searching thoughts that have some half-known, half-hidden character for their object. Sybil let time go by and forgot it, and did not see a darkening sky nor a coming storm, till thunder rolled and lightning flashed. She started to her feet, and hurried homewards. Her path now lay wholly by the sea, and what a grand sight met her view. The sky bent over the heaving waters. Between these stretched a space not clear, nor yet quite dark. There thunder lay brooding like a lion in his lair. A fishing-boat with anxious sails outspread flew home on green and livid-looking waves. Sybil was not timid by nature, and she liked that fierce

war of the elements. She stopped to look and admire.

"Sybil, Sybil," said her uncle's voice behind her, "what are you doing here?"

She looked round, and saw him carrying her cloak and umbrella.

"Quick!" he said; "do not linger—quick, Sybil!"

He was hurrying her away, when suddenly he stood still.

"If that cloud breaks into rain," he said, "you will be drenched. Neither cloak nor umbrella will save you. You see the coastguard's hut yonder—shall we have a run for it?"

"Oh! yes, let us," she eagerly replied; "I hate being wet—and I like a run of all things."

"Well, then, come on."

Sybil was light and fleet, and her feet now scarcely seemed to touch the earth. Her uncle Edward had taken her hand, lest she should fall or stumble over the uneven ground; but he had no need to support or assist her.

"Why, what a little light-footed nymph you are," he said, gaily, as they reached the hut; "and we are in time, too."

"The door is locked, uncle."

"Well, my dear, I must turn burglar, that is all."

Before she could remonstrate, he had picked up a pebble, broken the lock, and forced the door open. They entered the hut in time; scarcely had its door closed upon them, when the cloud broke, and the rain came pouring down in torrents. Her first feeling of joy at having reached a safe refuge over, Sybil began to look around her. Nothing could be ruder than this retreat. Its walls were of clay, but thick enough to withstand the storm; and its thatched roof was an effectual shelter against the rain. It had a door and a narrow window, and by way of furniture a stool, on which Sybil sat down, whilst her uncle held fast the door, which shook in the wind. The rain was dashing down with furious force, and Sybil, in great glee at having escaped it, cried, as she clapped her hands,

"We are safe!—we are safe!"

"Very true; but pray what kept you out with this storm coming on?"

"I was waiting for Blanche, uncle."

"And the fair Blanche seeing the sky covered

with heavy clouds, declared you could not possibly expect her, and stayed within."

"I am very glad of it," stoutly said Sybil; "I should not like her to be out in this weather. It was that storm which made her head ache, I have no doubt."

"No more have I," he drily replied; "electricity must have much influence on Miss Cains. She looks so sensitive, you know."

"She is sensitive," said Sybil, "and I wish, uncle, you would not spoil your kindness in coming out for me, by speaking so of dear Blanche."

"My dear, I shall not say another word about her, therefore we must needs agree. But allow me to wonder at the fascination which made you stay out so long. Pray, on which of her many virtues were you meditating?"

"I was not thinking about her at all," shortly replied Sybil, "I was thinking of some one very different from Blanche Cains. I was thinking of you, uncle."

"Were you! Pray, what might your thoughts be?"

Sybil sat on the stool, and he stood before her, leaning against the wall of the hut, his right hand

keeping fast and closed the frail door, which the wind shook wildly. He gazed down at the young girl, and his luminous gray eyes had a look so penetrating, that she blushed a little; but she replied frankly:

"I was thinking, uncle, that you are not happy, and wishing I could relieve you."

"Not happy! Who told you so?"

"You did, uncle, have you forgotten it?"

"Oh! it will blow off," he said lightly.

"Ah! yes, but it is hard."

"Hard!" he cried stamping his foot; "Sybil, it is intolerable!"

She rose, and went up to him.

"Uncle," she said earnestly, "speak, it will relieve you; on my word no one shall know it—not even Blanche Cains."

"Not even Blanche Cains," he repeated smiling, "and on your word, too; your yea and nay would have sufficed, Sybil—I know you are incapable of betrayal; but it would not relieve me to tell you—the trouble which words relieve is a light one. Why, its very nature would be a mystery to you. I am a slave, Sybil, and I loathe my bondage—that's all."

"You are married!" cried Sybil, amazed.

In a moment his face was all in a flame.

"Who told you so?" he asked, looking confounded at her quickness.

"No one," replied Sybil, confused; "I guessed it."

"Well, Sybil," he said after a short pause, and speaking in a much calmer tone, "you are a good archer; but yet your arrow overshot the mark. I am not married, but engaged."

"And you do not like her!" He was silent. "But she likes you."

"Does she! She is a sphinx."

"Ah! you like another," exclaimed Sybil, thinking that other must be Blanche Cains, and feeling a great throb of guilty joy.

"What if I do," he said with his keenest look, "does that set me free?"

"No," replied Sybil abashed.

"Well spoken, little casuist. Well, be it known unto you that I do not like another—I have not even the poor excuse of faithlessness. My little cruise went to the well once on a time, and came back full, and thought itself a very fountain, and lo and behold you!—looking into it the other day

I found that the waters were spilt and gone, and the poor cruise all barren and dry. Whose is the blame, Sybil—hers or mine? Was I too careless, or was she too prodigal? I know not, but, alas! where are those sweet waters now? What arid earth or barren sand has drank them up, God knows, Sybil; but they are gone, and gone for ever, and I am bound, and can I ever be free again?"

"No," said Sybil, "you cannot. Never!"

Her uncle seemed to wince as she uttered the words.

"You are made of steel," he said; "I have already noticed that terrible rigidity in you. What is right is and must be—escape or evasion is not to be thought of. And yet, Sybil, life has many loopholes."

"Uncle, I am very sorry for you," gently said Sybil; "but perhaps you will like her again."

"Water flows on, Sybil, never backwards."

"But why, having liked her once, not like her now, uncle?"

He laughed at the question.

"Thereby hangs a tale," he said, "and where's the use of telling it? It is so old, so very old a story, Sybil. Ah! if the heart would but be

changeless! If what charmed once would but charm for ever! There was a time when a storm like this would have seemed sunshine if it led to her; and now, oh! how sweet it would be to be out in that drenching rain, and feel its chillness in my very marrow, if by so doing I could but escape *once* that formerly worshipped presence. Do not look so scared, Sybil, and let us have no more of that dreary talk. How is the storm getting on? Clearing, it seems to me."

"Uncle, will you really marry her?" asked Sybil.

"Why, of course I will—did you not say yourself I must?"

"But hating her so!"

"I do not hate her at all, my good little girl! Why should I? but, oh! I confess it, I do abhor my self-sought bondage! What about it?"

He was quite callous, quite defiant again. Sybil shuddered.

"Oh! how dreadful," she said under her breath, "how dreadful for you—and for her!"

"I daresay she will never know anything about it," he replied carelessly. "I am not going to

tell her, you know. Let us hope, Sybil, that she will live and die thinking herself an adored woman."

But Sybil, looking on the mud floor of the cabin, thought: "God forbid this should ever be my fate!"

"The rain is over, Sybil; let us go. Your poor little feet must be wet, unless you will let me carry you home."

"Carry me!" echoed Sybil—"no, uncle, I am very heavy."

"Ah! to be sure. I had forgotten that. Come, put that cloak around you, and let us be gone."

Sybil obeyed. They went out; the sky was clear again, with a few heavy purple clouds; the sea shone and sparkled, yet rain still fell, and Uncle Edward opened the umbrella, and held it above Sybil as they walked along.

"Uncle," she said, very gravely, "you liked her once, and I cannot help thinking that if this misunderstanding were over——"

"There is no misunderstanding," he interrupted.

Sybil was a little abashed.

"Well, but, uncle," she said, rallying, "there is something."

"My dear Sybil, how can you talk of such things under an umbrella? In that little hut beyond, with the rain dashing and the storm rolling, I could talk nonsense; but with this umbrella over my head—a cotton one, too, borrowed from the kitchen—I feel chilled into commonplace itself."

He spoke quite lightly, but Sybil could not forget what she had heard. She looked up at him very earnestly—so earnestly, that he suddenly stood still.

"You should not, uncle," she said, gravely—"look, I am standing in the mud."

"I am very sorry; but why did you look up at me so with those soft pitiful eyes of yours? Those eyes should not belong to you, Sybil, for you are a child, and their youth has something eternal in it."

"My eyes are my own," saucily said Sybil, who knew quite well that she had fine eyes, having been told so from her childhood upwards; "but oh! uncle, how can you talk so?—under an umbrella, too!"

He did not mind her.

"Sybil," he said, still without moving, and forgetting that they were in a pool of water, "do not pity me—never pity a man. I told you so once—I tell you so again. It is his fate to get out of trouble, or if he cannot, to bear it; but, Sybil, my dear, such a net as I am now in may some day be cast around you. Do not struggle in its meshes, but tell me—tell me, Sybil—and it will be hard indeed if I do not set you free."

"Thank you, uncle," said Sybil, nimbly walking away from his side; "your boots are thick, and mine are thin, and so you recklessly lead me into pools of water. But we are at home now, and as I am half drowned, I shall leave you, with many thanks for your kindness."

She waved her hand, and tripped away, skipping over the quagmires of the path, and not once looking round at him. He closed his umbrella, and followed her; but Sybil never seemed aware of his presence till they both reached the house, and were received by Miss Cains, who was anxiously waiting for them on the threshold.

"My poor darling, what a mess you are in!" she exclaimed, looking pitifully at Sybil's feet.

"Yes," gravely replied Sybil—"uncle praised my eyes, and led me straight into the mud."

Miss Cains laughed, and looked at Sybil's uncle, who returned the gaze with something like defiance. Sybil saw the look, and, thinking that she read its meaning, was silenced at once by the revelation. She went up to her room, and took off her wet clothes, and thought: "Can it really be?" It so chanced that when she came down again she met her uncle on the staircase. He seemed inclined to pass by her without speaking, but Sybil addressed him:

"Uncle," she said, very earnestly, "I know it all now."

"What all?"

"Why, you don't like Blanche," she answered, in a very low tone.

He stood quite still, looking at her gravely. Sybil bent and whispered in his ear,

"Blanche is like her."

He did not answer her at once.

"Yes," he said at length, "that is it, Sybil—she is like her."

He went up undetained by Sybil, who went

down, secretly amazed and triumphant at her penetration, and also thinking: "If she is as handsome as Blanche, why does he not like her?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

BEFORE Sybil had reached the foot of the staircase, the door of Miss Cains's room opened, and that young lady herself came down rather quickly after her. She looked very bright and airy, and it was plain that her headache was all gone.

"Now, my poor little Sybil," she said, locking her arm within that of her friend, "what kept you out so long? I could not believe you were waiting for me, but your uncle would have it that you were, and went forth to meet you, whilst your aunt gave him scornful looks—they do not agree, do they?"

"Aunt does not like uncle—I cannot imagine why," replied Sybil.

"Can't you, you dear little simple thing?—why, it is plain as plain can be."

"Do you know why, Blanche?"

"Well, I believe I do, but I shall not tell you—it would be a pity; besides, it would interfere with my plans—you know I am still finding out wonderful things about Mr. Smith."

"Are you, Blanche?"

"Of course I am, and you could help me, if you liked; your uncle would be sure to tell you if you would only set the right way about it. Confess he tells you everything?"

She turned sharply upon Sybil as she made this remark, but though Sybil blushed a little, she did not feel tempted to betray her uncle to Blanche.

"I wish he did tell me everything," she said; "but the fact is, he has a way of putting me off, and I can get nothing out of him."

"He is afraid you would tell me," said Miss Cains.

"But I would not tell you," rejoined Sybil. "I would tell no one, and he need not fear."

"You are an austere little thing," said Blanche gravely; "but for all that you have a tell-tale face; and something passed between Green-eyes and you when you were out together. There, you need not redden so—I do not care about his secrets, child, and you have none. Indeed, I have

other fish to fry. I have been thinking of the cabal, Sybil, and as my name is Blanche Cains, I will make these young ladies repent their intended insult upon you."

Miss Cains looked very handsome as she uttered this defiant speech. Indeed, from the moment that the cabal against Sybil was fully explained to Blanche Cains, that heroic young lady declared it was her firm resolve to annihilate it. Now, Miss Glyn, on learning the circumstances of the cabal, felt deeply incensed against the ladies, English and French, old and young, with whom it had originated; but she felt more than incensed with the avowed intention of Miss Cains. That this little upstart should be her niece's champion was insufferable. She had not liked Miss Cains from the first; but after the bold confession which Blanche again uttered this day at dinner, "I never allow my enemies to get ahead of me," she fairly detested her. She was sure, she was, that there was defiance in Miss Blanche's blue eye as it lit upon her, and she took the declaration as a challenge—neither more nor less.

"My dear James," she said to her brother-in-law after dinner, "I am very sorry that Miss

Cains is with Sybil. I do not like her manner; she talks slang; she is insolent, and she stares at men in a way which is quite shocking."

"Men! what men?" asked Mr. Kennedy.

"Well, I did not mean you."

"Then you meant my brother Edward. I have not noticed it; but for once we agree. I neither like that young lady nor her manners; only, poor wretch, I cannot turn her out, can I?"

"But surely she is not going to stay here for ever?"

"She has not been here a week," shortly replied Mr. Kennedy; and as it was plain that they would soon cease to agree if they pursued this subject, he walked away, and left Miss Glyn with the memory of a new wrong to treasure up against poor Miss Cains.

Poverty is a sharp school; moreover, though Miss Cains was not an ardent reader like Sybil, and did not go wild about dead men and women, she had plenty of cleverness. She was quick-witted, brave, and keen-sighted. She knew her enemies at once, and neither feared nor spared them.

"My usual luck," she said to Sybil, as they walked in the garden after dinner. "I have affronted your aunt. Look at her talking to your father—it is about me. She is telling him that I am vulgar, and can only spoil you. Sybil—Sybil," she added, almost sadly, "why is it no one loves me?"

"But you are loved!" cried Sybil.

"No," replied her friend, sitting down on a bench in the sun. "Women fear me, and men admire me, but no one loves me!"

"But I do!—I do!" said Sybil, throwing her arms around her. "I love you!"

As a rule, Miss Cains rather submitted to Sybil's girlish fondness than liked it. She valued her affection, but had been too much tossed about by a hard world to care for her caresses. Now, however, she caught her in her arms, and nearly smothered her with kisses, and all the while her tears flowed and sobs broke from her.

"Sybil, I am wretched," she said—"I am miserable—the whole world is against me!"

"Now, that's nonsense," interrupted Sybil, drawing away to look at her. "Perhaps we shall have a cabal against you, too; but until then,

how can you say the whole world is against you?"

But though Blanche checked her tears, her blue eyes kept a moody look.

"I know what I am saying," she said. "Why does not your uncle go to Mrs. Ronald's party, Sybil?"

"Is he not going?" asked Sybil.

"No, I saw him this morning on the staircase, and I asked him if to-morrow were not the day of the party. He replied he did not know, that he was not going? And now shall I tell you why he is not going—because he is afraid of me. Yes, afraid of me; that Green-eyes is prudent. I know, or at least I guess, what promise you reminded him of the other evening, when I said I expected no partners. Of course, you had made him promise to dance with me, or something of the kind. Well, rather than keep his word, and commit himself, he will not go. Sybil—Sybil, I am afraid you have gone beyond the dancing. Perhaps you suggested that he should marry your poor friend. There you are red enough—you stand confessed! Well, poor child, I forgive you, but never do it again."

When Sybil could speak, it was to say,

"Blanche, you frighten me!"

"Why so?"

"You are so dreadfully clear-sighted."

"Am I? Well, you are not, to be sure, and therefore it seems marvellous to you, who go about life with bandaged eyes, that I should see my way as I do. Never mind; of the two you will fare the better in the main, and my clear-sightedness only helps to give me pain. And now, child," she added, with a sudden change of tone and manner, "do let us see about those white roses—will they do, or not?"

This important question took them in, and was debated and argued again and again, and not finally settled till the next day, an hour before dressing for the ball.

"Blanche, you are splendidly handsome!" said Sybil, as they entered Mrs. Ronald's drawing-room with Mr. Kennedy and Miss Glyn; "mind you do not let the cabal triumph."

"If I do!" said Blanche; a smile of saucy triumph told her meaning.

Miss Glyn's worst presentiments were fulfilled on that fatal evening. Sybil was eclipsed by her friend, and looked insignificant by her side;

and this was to be her first interview with Count de Renneville!

Exasperating though it was to let Sybil wear blue, which did not suit her, Miss Glyn had submitted to this crying evil, rather than betray her secret, by seeming to take an undue interest in her niece's good looks. She even declined to superintend her preparations, or to advise her in any manner, and kept up an appearance of injured dignity, which could not but deceive Mr. Kennedy, who, indeed, did not suspect any one would attempt to provide his daughter with a husband without first consulting him and Sybil, who did not think about a husband at all. But there was a third person whom this matter did not seem to concern, and who yet proved more clear-sighted than Miss Glyn would have liked had she known it; this was Miss Blanche Cains.

"Your aunt is up to something," she repeatedly said to Sybil; "I see it. I tell you there is something in the wind."

"Something!—what then?" asked Sybil amazed.

"I cannot tell, but something there is."

Sybil looked at Blanche, and thought she knew what ailed her aunt. Miss Cains was certainly

very beautiful that evening, and no one admired her more than generous little Sybil.

"What a grand, sparkling creature she is!" she whispered to her father.

He gave Miss Cains a critical look, and smiled.

"Yes, she is not amiss," he said. "I think I shall dance with her. Must I, Sybil?"

"Oh! do," she entreated.

He went and asked Miss Cains, who stood a few paces off. She smiled and bowed assent; and Sybil, whom a tall, handsome man had just asked and was leading out, watched them, to the no small detriment of her partner. In vain did this gentleman seek to engage her attention. Miss Kennedy's eyes were too busy for her mind not to follow them. What a noble pair they looked! Blanche was so lovely, with that white wreath in her hair; and the row of pearls with the sparkling heart affixed to it which encircled her throat —Sybil's gift—was not purer in hue than the fair neck on which it rested. Then she had such fine features and such noble shoulders, and she was such a grand-looking creature altogether, that Sybil thought,

"Oh! what a pity uncle could not fall in love with and marry her! She would just do for him, and he would just do for her."

So strong was this impression, that she could not help imparting one of its main features to Blanche when they met again in a pause of the dancing. Miss Cains was fanning herself with much zeal, and Mr. Kennedy had gone to fetch her an ice, when Sybil said eagerly,

"Now, Blanche, confess there is no one here so handsome as Uncle Edward."

Blanche stared, then looked frigid.

"Oh! he has green eyes, you know."

"He has not, Blanche."

Miss Cains laughed carelessly, and said,

"Nonsense;" then added quickly, "I told you that your aunt was up to something; I know it now, Sybil."

"Know!—know what?"

Blanche did not answer; Sybil's partner had come back, and with him Mr. Kennedy. The dancing began anew, and they had no immediate opportunity of renewing their discourse.

In spite of the cabal, Sybil had a few partners, but Miss Cains had a superfluity of this precious

commodity. She danced three times running with Mr. Kennedy, who seemed nothing loth, and after him with every man who was so fortunate as to secure her. She was evidently the queen of the night, and evidently, too, she saw and enjoyed her success.

"She is certainly a fine girl," said Mr. Kennedy to his daughter; "but is she not a bit of a flirt, Sybil?"

"A flirt!—no, indeed," was the indignant reply; "I am amazed at you, papa."

"Are you, my dear?—well, at all events, you will grant there is not much in her?"

"Not much! Why, papa, she is amazingly clever!"

"Is she really," he answered carelessly; "I should not have thought so."

And seeing some one whom he knew in the crowd, Mr. Kennedy rose and walked away. Sybil felt vexed. How tiresome no one appreciated dear Blanche. And then how strange her father did not make her dance, but left her without a partner, sitting near her aunt, who was all-absorbed with these French people. A very close, and, if Sybil had but known it, a very interesting conversation was

then going on between Miss Glyn and a dowager lady and her son; but Sybil, looking on dolefully at the dancing, in which she could not join, lent it but an inattentive ear. There they were, chatting away about "social progress, and the element of commerce in modern society, and the might of capital," and what was it all to her?

"Capital," said the dowager's son, "is simply the grand hinge on which society now revolves."

"I think so," dogmatically replied Miss Glyn.

The gentleman bowed, and resumed,

"Supported by your authority, I will venture to add, that capital *is* society—take away capital, and society vanishes."

"I am sure of it," said Miss Glyn.

"Next to capital comes the working of capital," resumed the gentleman; "and that ought to be the special duty of every man who means to keep on a par with his age."

To this axiom, Miss Glyn added an unexpected corollary—

"I think women ought to work capital too."

The gentleman seemed taken by surprise; but he recovered quickly, and said,

"Very true."

"I think women have a strong business talent," resumed Miss Glyn, fastening her brown eye upon him.

"Diplomatic," he suggested.

"And administrative too," she rejoined, a little severely.

He bowed his graceful head, and declared he did not doubt it.

Sybil suppressed a yawn, and began to think that it was not all pleasure to go to parties. Suddenly Blanche came up to her. She took the place Mr. Kennedy had left vacant, and whispered eagerly,

"Well, I was right, was I not?"

Sybil's surprise was so great, and so legibly expressed in her countenance, that Blanche saw the propriety of leading her away. She took her arm, and did so with as much composure as if she had been one of Mrs. Ronald's oldest guests.

"My dear child," she said, as they paced a comparatively quiet part of the ball-room, "I told you there was something, and you must be a little goose not to have found it out. But, first of all, why don't you dance?"

"Why, because I am not asked."

"Why don't you make yourself be asked?"

"Now, Blanche——"

"Now, Sybil, I am not going to stand that—there you are, the prettiest girl in the room, without a partner. Why did you not tell Mr. Kennedy to dance with you? I see I must lecture you; but that will do at home—for the present I must enlighten you. Do you know with whom you danced when we came in?"

"No; but I suppose aunt does, for she and that gentleman have been talking about capital and social progress ever so long."

"The very thing. Well, my dear, you have been dancing with your future husband, Count André de Renneville, a young nobleman of very ancient birth, and very small means, who is much smitten with Miss Kennedy's charms of purse and person."

Miss Kennedy's face expressed so much amazement, that the fair Blanche had something ado not to laugh outright. However, she did refrain, and resumed,

"It is so, I know it; and what is more, everyone in this room knows it save you and your father, who is as wisely and as profoundly igno-

rant as your wise self. I daresay Miss Glyn would not thank me for telling you, but I don't care—not I. You must know it; and another time, my dear girl, do not wear blue."

Sybil turned red and pale alternately.

"Well, what are you frightening yourself about?" asked Blanche; "is the prospect before you so dreadful? I know all about him, for my partners kindly gave me the particulars, and by their jealousy of him, enlightened me more than if they had praised him ever so much. Talk of women being envious—my dear, the men surpass us in that, as they do in everything. Well, I learned this, that there is not a stain on this noble Count's character, that he is terribly poor, that he must marry a rich wife, and that he has declared he will not marry a plain one: beauty he must have. So thinking you rich and handsome enough to be made a countess of, he has spoken to Madame de Lonville, who has spoken to your aunt, who has spoken to no one, and who is now coming towards us with his countship, no doubt to ask you to honour him with your hand in the next quadrille. And there is my partner looking for me in sore distress, so good-bye to you."

She moved away as Miss Glynn came up with the Count de Renneville.

"You may dance now, my dear," graciously said Miss Glyn, thus intimating that if Sybil had not danced, it was by no means for want of a partner, but because her aunt had prohibited her from doing so. The Count said a few words, which Sybil did not hear, for there was a rushing sound in her ears, but she gave him her hand, and he led her away; and as they moved through the crowd, Sybil could see that more than one scrutinizing eye was fastened upon them.

The attention she had denied him in the early part of the evening, Sybil now bestowed on her partner. And so this was André de Renneville, the hero of Denise's admiration; the poor and proud gentleman who had been conquered in the battle of life. She saw him, as girls see, without looking at him. He was a pale handsome man, fair, with grave eyes, and a serious lip. There was power, tempered by sadness, in his face. Her heart beat with pity and emotion as she remembered what his trials had been. And had he fixed upon her to retrieve the decayed fortunes of his house, and was she perhaps destined to give new

lustre to that fallen name? She scanned him without embarrassment or shame, without undue freedom, but with the frank simplicity that was in her nature. Their eyes met: in hers he could read "sweet records, promises as sweet." In his Sybil found a respectful admiration, which agreed with his manner, courteous and refined, and wholly free from any servile desire of pleasing the wealthy girl. Sybil felt, as she listened to him—and he talked well, though he was not a prolix talker—that she stood in the presence of a nobly-born gentleman, refined and well-bred, and worthy of the happy destiny Fate denied him. Then came the insidious question whispering at her heart: "Shall you be the one?—are you destined to redeem the Renneville race?"

By the time M. de Renneville led Sybil back to her aunt, the young girl's mind was equal to answering the question put to her by that lady.

"Sybil," she said, very gravely, "do you know the gentleman who has just left you?"

"Yes," replied Sybil, in a low calm tone, "he is Count de Renneville."

Her manner struck Miss Glyn.

"Do you know what brought him here this evening?" she asked.

Sybil bowed her dark head without answering.

"And what do you think of him?" asked her aunt.

"I never noticed him before this evening."

"My dear, I do not ask you if you are ready to say yes or no; but you can tell me this, is he displeasing to you?"

"No," replied Sybil, in the same calm low tone with which she had first spoken.

Miss Glyn rose, and confiding Sybil to Madame de Lonville, went in search of her brother-in-law. After a brief conference with him, she introduced him to Count de Renneville. Sybil, who saw all this from afar, felt like one in a dream. The few quiet words she had spoken had done this; her father probably had some previous knowledge of Count de Renneville, and had no objection to seeing his daughter a Countess; and so Count de Renneville's visits were sanctioned—she felt sure of it. She wondered whether, on seeing him nearer, she would like him; whether that man of whom she knew nothing, an hour before, would really be that momentous being—her future hus-

band? She looked at him and at his mother, a cold, haughty woman, with a sort of awe. Would they ever like her, the little plebeian, and really forgive her her obscure birth? She felt half-frightened of them both, and half-sorry, too, that she had not at once put a stop to the matter. But it was too late now; the few words she had spoken had so far bound her, that she must give Count de Renneville a trial.

"Well, Pussy, you are very demure!" said her father, gaily.

She gave a little start on perceiving him by her side, for she had not seen or heard him coming.

"Are you ready, and is your peerless friend ready?" asked Mr. Kennedy. "The place is thinning."

So it was. The heated room was growing cool, and you could see now the dust on the floor which the dancers' feet no longer hid. Count de Renneville and his mother still lingered among the guests, no doubt to see them off. Madame de Lonville rose abruptly, and joined them. Mechanically Sybil rose too, and took her father's arm. She looked round for Blanche, and saw her coming, escorted by one of her partners; the Count stood

by Miss Glyn's side, and walked with her down-stairs to the carriage. Mr. Kennedy entered it last; from the corner where she hid herself, Sybil could hear him saying:

"I trust you will find your way to Saint Vincent one of these days?"

The answer, though slowly uttered, came ready and clear:

"I shall be too happy to do so."

Mr. Kennedy entered the carriage, which rolled away on the stony road. Not one word did Sybil utter all the way home; she had never felt so grave or so thoughtful in her life before; she must either accept or reject this man, and either seemed formidable to little Sybil's inexperience. So every one else talked, but she was silent; their mirth, their laughter, in which even Miss Glyn joined, seemed amazing to Sybil with her mind full of this one thing. It was a relief when she reached home and got to her own room, and for once she would rather that Blanche had not followed her there.

"Well," said that gay young lady, "is it to be or not to be, Sybil?"

Sybil shook her head and was silent.

"Silence means consent. Well, you will make a pretty countess," resumed Miss Cains admiringly; "only, for goodness sake, do not wear blue any more, child!"

"Well, but you cannot wear pink," argued Sybil, trying to rouse herself up.

"No, child, and I do not mean to wear it either —pink kills me; but you need not wear blue for that. Well, it was a delightful party," she added, reclining back in Sybil's little armchair. "I say, how savage all these French girls looked! I suppose I gave them a new Waterloo—on their own ground, too. I enjoyed it amazingly!"

Her blue eyes sparkled with triumph; she looked so handsome that Sybil was dazzled. She wondered, too, if the Count would not have preferred her had she been rich. Such thoughts did not seem to trouble Blanche Cains. If she was not the perfect being Sybil dreamed her to be, from one fault she was free—she knew not envy. She liked pleasure, wealth, luxury, and all the joys of life, but though she was penniless, she was too proud not to scorn that mean repining after another's good which is the test of small natures. So she went on gaily exulting in her triumph, not

caring to remember that if she had been the belle of the night, she had also been the poorest girl present; now and then digressing from this theme to teaze Sybil concerning her significant silence, or to warn her against blue, and finally bidding her good night with a saucy "I have broken the cabal, have I not, little Countess?"

Sybil undressed, and said her prayers, and went to bed, but could not sleep—before her eyes ever floated the grave sad face of Count de Renneville, and when she slumbered at length it was with her still. Once it grew so vivid that she awoke with a start, and sat up in bed, looking at her moonlit window, and half dreaming, "Was it to be?" Did the mysterious future hold that tale within its pages, or would it dissolve like a fantastic vision, and be seen no more?

"God knows," thought Sybil with a troubled heart; "but oh! how I wish I did know!"

CHAPTER XIX.

THE thoughts which had filled Sybil's mind as she fell asleep were also uppermost with every person whom she saw the next morning.

"Well, little Countess," gaily said Miss Cains, as they met on the staircase.

Sybil raised a threatening forefinger, then looked at her friend with some surprise.

"You have been out walking?" she said.

"I just had a look at the garden."

"I thought you had been by the sea—look!" and she showed her a bunch of tangled seaweed which clung to her cloak.

"Well, I have been by the sea," a little shortly replied Miss Cains. "I had a bad headache, and thought the air would do me good, so I walked along the beach.

"But the tide is in, said Sybil; you could not

find room on the beach between cliff and sea, could you?"

"Now, little Countess, you want to lead me off my topic," gaily replied Miss Cains; "but whether I have been by the beach, or above it like a bird, or under it like a fish——"

"Oh! I know where you have been now," interrupted Sybil; "you have been to my haunt. The westerly wind often sweeps the seaweed up there; and look, this bunch of weed has been many a day out of the sea; it is dry and withered. But why did you want to mystify me, Blanche?"

"You dear little goose, you mystify yourself, not I. Did you dream of him?"

Sybil blushed, for her father now appeared at the foot of the staircase, with a smile on his lips.

"Well, little Countess," he said, using the very words of Blanche Cains, "how are you this morning?"

"I am very well, but I am not sure that I shall or will be a little Countess," said Sybil gravely.

Her father laughed, and quite as gravely replied,

"No more am I sure that I will let you be one, Pussy."

To say the truth, Mr. Kennedy was the last man who would bestow his daughter on a penniless count, and of mere affection for that title. But then Mr. Kennedy, as a rule, liked what the world liked; and if the world thought it a good thing for Sybil to wear a coronet, and for her father to be so closely connected with a gentleman of ancient birth and unblemished character, Mr. Kennedy was just the man to think so too. He had had other views for her, but having received a check where he least expected one, he was sufficiently pleased that his daughter and himself should have this chance, if it was a good one, within their grasp; and it was with a feeling of satisfaction that he hailed her as "little Countess."

"You will find your aunt in the dining-room," he continued. "She wants to speak to you, and is quite amazed you should be so late this morning."

Miss Glyn was, indeed, sufficiently impatient to have a sensible talk with her niece, and she saw her enter the dining-room with evident satisfaction.

"My dear child," she said, "how could you be so late on such a morning? The Count will be

coming, of course, to inquire how we have spent the night."

"Not this morning, aunt," said Sybil. "Besides, even if he should come, I shall not see him."

"Not see him!"

"Why, aunt, I am not to take his visit to myself, am I?"

"Well—no—you are right, Sybil, and I am glad to find you so discreet. There is no hurry—none whatever. I must ascertain how far that young man is equal to the management of capital—under my directions, of course—before I can recommend you to think of him at all. You know my meaning, Sybil. I would never have you make a mercenary marriage; but neither would I have you contract an imprudent one. Now, the man who cannot manage capital—who is not equal to capital——"

Here Miss Glyn's exordium came to an abrupt close. Denise had opened the door, and exclaimed in tones full of dismay—

"The cow kicked the pail of milk, and there's not a drop left."

"Not a drop?" said Miss Glyn.

"Not a drop."

This domestic misfortune completely banished the Count from Miss Glyn's mind for the time being; and as she was one of these notable housekeepers who think nothing well done unless they see it done, she abruptly left the room, and proceeded at once to the scene of the calamity. She was scarcely gone when Uncle Edward opened the door and entered. Sybil went up to him in all friendliness.

"Good morning, uncle," she said gaily. "The cabal is broken, and Blanche was the queen of the night."

"Pray how did Miss Cains like that?" rather drily inquired Uncle Edward, sitting down in Miss Glyn's vacant chair.

"Why, very well, of course," jealously replied Sybil. "What girl would dislike it?"

"Why, no, you good, candid, little thing, no girl would. It is glory, fame, honour, and more, if more could be, to you all. So let it be. But I thought you had more to tell me, Sybil."

He spoke so gravely, he looked at her so keenly, that the blood rushed up to Sybil's face, and covered it with a deep rosy blush. How could he know it—so soon, too!

"Who told you?" she asked a little impetuously; "you, too, have got seaweed about you. Was it Blanche?"

Her uncle looked at her in some amazement. Her eyes flashed; she was so excited that she shook again and trembled.

"You are a strange girl," he replied very gravely. "I met Miss Cains this morning down by the pines; but surely you do not suppose this was the subject of our conversation. As for the seaweed," he added, shaking his hair, whence it fell on the floor, "what has it to do with my question, Sybil?"

Sybil was silent.

"And is it really so?" he resumed. "And yet you once promised me to enter into no such engagement without my knowledge, Sybil."

"Uncle, there is no engagement."

"My dear, when a girl allows such a man as Count de Renneville to seek her society, his avowed purpose being marriage, she gives him, or rather she gives her future destiny a pledge she rarely breaks."

Sybil, looked as she felt, rather dismayed.

"I hope not," she said quickly—"I trust not."

Then seeing how grave and silent he looked, she added, hesitatingly—"Do you know him, uncle?"

"Yes, I have had dealings with him on your father's behalf."

Sybil looked at him earnestly; but he did not seem disposed to be communicative. She took courage to question.

"Dear uncle," she entreated, "do you know any harm of him?"

"My dear, I do not. I had dealings with him, as I tell you, and found him gentlemanlike, cool, and collected. I need not tell you he is handsome, and has pleasing manners—more I know not."

"And yet, uncle, you seem to disapprove."

"I do. I cannot imagine why your friends are in so great a hurry to see you married, and a countess."

"I do not care about that, uncle."

"And what else is there to care about? Are there not scores of men equal to that one?"

"Perhaps they will not care for me, uncle."

"If you give them time, they will. I'll be bound you were the prettiest girl in the room last night."

"No, uncle, it was Blanche."

"Oh, she is handsome." Then there was a pause, after which he resumed, "And so it is to be the Count, Sybil?"

"Dear uncle," said Sybil gently, "I really have not made up my mind."

Uncle Edward gave his tawny locks an impatient toss, and he echoed in a mimicking tone:

"Dear niece, you will really make up your mind, or his countship will make it up for you. He has so far pleased you, that you have allowed him to come; and is it credible that, having no other purpose in view than to follow up this favourable impression, he will not succeed! Why you are all so much charmed with him, I cannot tell. He is handsome, but so are others—gentlemanlike, so are others—pleasing, so are others; of looking further or deeper, I of course acquit you."

There was so much irony in his tone, that Sybil felt hurt, too much hurt, indeed, to follow up the argument. It was plain to her that her uncle was prejudiced against her suitor, though he could give no valid reason for the feeling. So turning away from him, she went and looked out of the

window. The sunshine of morning reposed on the landscape. Far off she could see a line of leafy trees on the blue sky, and rising from among them the conical turrets and slate roofs of the old manor. There had dwelt in days of old, that bold Raymond, who waged war against sovereigns, who was great as a prince, and richer than many princes. He little thought the day would come when his descendant would woo a strange girl for her money. "For if I were poor, he would not think of me," said Sybil to herself. "Strange that none of them should think of that objection! I suppose his title and my money make us quits—and then, after all, the whole world knows he would not marry his cousin, who was richer than I am." There was something in that thought which proved infinitely soothing to Sybil's pride. It agreed with an impression she had received from Count de Renneville's manner on the preceding evening; that he had chosen her. His looks, his tones had both told her the same story, and Sybil's was not the age when such a tale is doubted. There were plenty of rich girls about Saint Vincent; but for all that, she was the one he had selected, and on whose decree he was willing to

stake the happiness and the fortunes of his future. Indeed, her uncle himself, averse to this match as he was, did not doubt the Count's sincerity. Why, then, should she?

"There is no help for it," here said Miss Glyn's voice, "we must do without milk this morning."

Thus called out of her dreaming, Sybil came down once more to the realities of life, condoled with her aunt, and gave her uncle a shy look. His brows were knit, and his countenance was so severe and displeased, that Sybil turned her look away. What had she done, that he should take it so much amiss; and, after all, what was it to him if she married Count de Renneville, or not? His cold and altered manner gave her further tokens of his displeasure during breakfast-time. He did not look at her, or if he did his eyes did not seem to see her; he did not address her once. He talked with her father of a journey he was going to take; but not once did he attempt to include her in his conversation, and when she spoke he was silent. Sybil felt she was in disgrace.

"What is the matter between your uncle and you," bluntly asked Miss Cains, as they sat alone that evening in the drawing-room.

"I believe he does not like all this about Count de Renneville."

"And what is it to him?" tartly asked Blanche.

"He thinks I am too young. Besides, I know I vexed him this morning."

"Vexed Green-eyes!—impossible."

"Yes, I did, and I am afraid you did too, Blanche, when you and he met at the pine trees."

For a moment Miss Cains stood irresolute, as if not knowing how to take Sybil's remark. She looked at her surprised, and doubting, and at length said: "We scarcely spoke—how could I vex him?"

"Blanche, you scorn him—and I fear he sees it. Oh! Blanche, Blanche," she added, fondly clasping her arms around her, "what a pity it cannot be! I did so hope you would like each other, and marry."

"Nonsense. To begin with, we cannot like each other."

"Now, Blanche, you are too scornful. Any one can see he admires you, but——"

"Has he told you so?" interrupted Miss Cains very coldly.

"No, Blanche, but I have eyes, and I could see how he looked at you—when you came—

whereas you—oh! you are too bad, there is disdain in every one of your glances."

Miss Cains laughed.

"Do you know what he and I spoke of this morning?" she asked.

"No—oh! do tell me, Blanche, do."

"We talked of Ulysses and the Syrens. Was not that a delightful subject of conversation on a cool morning like this? I fairly wished him in the sea. Dreadful man!—he gave me the shivers."

Sybil laughed.

"I should like to be a mermaid," she said gaily, "to live in the blue seas and green grottoes, and comb my hair and sing. I should like it of all things, Blanche?"

Miss Cains yawned.

"Well," she said, languidly, "I should not mind being a mermaid for a few hours—nay, for a few days—but in very warm weather, of course. It always exasperates me to look at the sea, and to think she is full of treasures—greedy wretch!—which would make me happy, and are of no use to her. Think of the pearls, and the coral, and the coined gold she keeps, Sybil! Oh! I should like to dive and bring up amazingly."

"Oh! but I would not be a mermaid for anything," cried Sybil, with sudden dismay. "I had forgotten that she is half a fish—oh! no, that would never do."

"I should not mind that a bit," coolly said Miss Cains—"never mind about being half a fish for a time, when the prize is so great."

"But I do mind," retorted Sybil, speaking in so sharp and loud a key, that Miss Glyn, who was then entering the room, asked uneasily, "What was the matter?"

"Sybil objects to being a mermaid," gravely replied Miss Cains.

"My dear, what wild talk!" remarked Miss Glyn, with some severity.

"Well, I have read in the Koran that when the Queen of Sheba went to visit Solomon——"

"Sybil, are you crazy?" interrupted Miss Glyn, almost angrily; "why, what would anyone think who heard you talk of the Koran in that strange way?"

Sybil only laughed saucily, for she knew that "anyone" meant Count de Renneville. But even as she laughed, she suddenly remembered that she had not seen her uncle since dinner-time.

"Papa," she said, addressing her father, who had entered the room with Miss Glyn, "where is uncle, please?"

"My dear, he is gone."

"For a long time?"

"For a few weeks."

Sybil felt sobered at once. Why had her uncle left without bidding her good-bye?—why had he left at all? Sybil looked at her aunt, then at Blanche, and finally at her father; but no one else seemed to take any interest in this matter. Mr. Kennedy's brother was gone, and there was an end of it.

The young are true. Their affections may not lie deep, but there is a fervour in them which redeems them from the reproach of shallowness. Sybil felt unhappy when she went up to her room that evening. She was very sorry for the friend who had left, and she feared he had left for the sake of the lover who was coming. Why should the Count be unacceptable to her uncle? But perhaps the Count had nothing to do with his departure. Perhaps some letter had suddenly called him away. "Denise will tell me," thought Sybil. She at once proceeded to the room of that

discreet hand-maiden, whom she found fast asleep, with her unsnuffed candle flaring beside her. With some asperity, Sybil asked Denise, who awoke with a guilty start, if she wanted to set the house on fire.

"God forbid!" said Denise; "it was the burning of the family papers that first brought the Rennevilles down—gambling did the rest."

Sybil forgot to chide; she forgot, even, that she had come to question Denise concerning her uncle's departure. She stood looking at the girl's full round face and dull blue eyes, hesitating whether or not to make Denise pursue a topic on which the poor girl was always eloquent. She had been a servant in the Renneville family, and though years had passed since then, the old worship was still strong in her heart.

"And so it was his father's gambling," at length said Sybil, "that brought him down so low, and makes him look so sad?"

"Oh! he has had plenty of other troubles," said Denise, briskly; "his poor cousin, you know, who married another——"

"I thought she was rich," said Sybil, reddening.

"Oh! that was the plain one—the pretty one was poor. He never seemed to care about her, but he fainted when he heard she was married."

"Who is she?—where is she, Denise?"

"Oh! she is dead, and her husband is married again, and has a family of children."

"I suppose he grieves for her still?" remarked Sybil.

She tried to speak sympathetically, but she was not much pleased to find she had had a predecessor.

"La!—why should he?" innocently said Denise, "when her own husband is comforted. Besides, he always knew he could not marry her."

Oh! what bitter and hard lessons poverty and pride had taught this man! What self-denial and self-subjection had he not practised to reach his thirtieth year unsullied in honour! Sybil stood lost in thought, then suddenly she gave a little start.

"What step is that?" she asked.

"I believe it is Monsieur Edouard going down," replied Denise, calmly.

Monsieur Edouard was the name by which Mr. Kennedy's brother was known in Saint Vincent.

"Is he not gone?" cried Sybil.

Denise did not know; she had seen Monsieur Edouard an hour ago.

"He is going to the library, and I have the key," quickly said Sybil—"good night, Denise."

Denise volunteered to take down the key, but ere her speech was half over Sybil was down the stairs. She found her uncle at the library door, in the act of turning away, with a light in his hand. Sybil silently took out her key, and showed it him. Half smiling, he held out his hand, but Sybil put her hands behind her back, and shook her head demurely.

"No, uncle," she said; "you must pay toll. I thought you were gone."

"I forgot some papers, and came back for them."

"I thought you had forgotten to bid me good-bye, uncle, and came back for that."

"Sybil, give me the key, if you please. I must be gone by five o'clock to-morrow morning."

"The library is mine," obstinately replied Sybil; "papa made it over to me, and I give or withhold the key at my pleasure."

"I can do without it," he said, turning away;

"it is only sitting up and re-writing a few letters, Sybil."

"Take it," she said, in a low voice; but though her face was averted, her uncle saw tears in her eyes. He took the key from her extended hand, and opened the library door; but suddenly pausing in the act, he said,

"I shall want you, Sybil. You must find Johnson for me, if you please."

Sybil's face brightened, she snatched the light from his hand, and darted on before him. In a second she was up the steps, and was reaching down the heavy quarto, when he chidingly came to her assistance.

"Why, the weight of that surly old lexicographer is enough to make you fall, Sybil," he said, taking it from her.

"Oh! but I am stronger than you think," jealously replied Sybil, reluctantly surrendering the volume; "but the truth is, you do not want me to help you."

"Now, Sybil, do not talk nonsense."

"Well, but why did you go away without bidding me good-bye?" she asked, sitting down for an explanation; "but you need not tell me,"

she resumed, "it is all about Count de Renneville."

"No, Sybil, it is not; it is all about you."

"Uncle, why do you object?"

"Sybil, how old are you?"

Sybil blushed.

"I am very young, I know."

"You are, indeed; and he is not. I grant that he is honourable and good; you might wait and do better. I know no harm of him; but how has he reached his present years and found no other issue to his troubles than marriage? Is life shut to him?—is he too proud to fight his way?—can he not work?"

"His mother would not let him."

"He is a good son," replied Uncle Edward, with a touch of scorn.

"He is, uncle," warmly said Sybil; "and I believe that is good security for his becoming a good husband."

"Do you mean to try, Sybil?"

"Indeed, uncle, I do not know. I once promised you to enter into no engagement."

"I release you from that promise," he said, gravely. "Your father, your aunt, like the match——"

"But I should like you to like it too," said Sybil, going up to him and coaxingly passing her arm within his, "and not to be knitting your brows in that grave way, Uncle Edward."

Uncle Edward laughed. His look softened, his mouth relaxed.

"Tell me the truth," he said, looking down at her, "do you really like that young man?"

"Not yet, uncle; but I may, you know."

"If you do, be happy, be very happy, Sybil; and if ever you want a friend, come to me."

"Uncle, you speak as if you thought I should not be happy."

"I have no right to do so; the fact is, I am not just to that young man. I am jealous of him, Sybil. No mother ever thought another woman good enough for her son, no brother thinks a man worthy of his sister, and I cannot think this pretty count good enough for you. Besides, it seems such quick work. You would not have thought of him, Sybil."

"No, nor of any man who did not ask me, uncle."

"Well, I suppose that is woman's nature; so even let it be. And now good night, my dear.

It is late, and I have a few words to add to my letters."

Sybil silently went and fetched the inkstand, and placed it before him. He sat down and smiled.

"What a good little thing you are," he said, resting his elbow on the table, and looking kindly at her; "what a little, willing, and busy hand-maiden you are ever ready to make yourself! That count will be a happy man."

Sybil dropped him a curtsey, and uttered a saucy "Perhaps he will, and perhaps he will not."

"That is how it is," he continued; "some draw the great prizes, and others blanks, and it must be so to the end of time."

"Poor uncle!" thought Sybil, looking at him wistfully; "what a pity he should be crossed in love! He is quite young yet—not older than the Count."

"Good night, my dear," plainly said her uncle, dismissing her.

"Good night, uncle."

"And good-bye, for I leave early."

"And when do you come back, uncle?"

"Not till you have become a countess, my dear."

"What!" cried Sybil, reddening, "you will not come back for my wedding—if I do marry?"

"No, certainly not," he curtly answered.

"Then you hate him!" she exclaimed, dismayed.

"Not at all; but we should not suit—that is the truth."

Tears rushed to Sybil's eyes.

"And so," she said, "if I marry, I must lose you?"

His silence implied assent.

"Oh! uncle!" she said, imploringly.

"My dear child, do not fret; but it cannot be helped."

He spoke so coldly, that Sybil felt chilled.

"Good night, uncle," she said.

"Good night, my dear."

"Good-bye, uncle."

"Good-bye, Sybil."

She held out her hand. He took and pressed it, but without much cordiality. Sybil's heart sank. She walked slowly to the door; before she reached

it she saw that her uncle had dipped his pen in ink, and was writing.

This was their farewell! Whose was the blame? Was he too exacting?—had she too readily dropped the old friendship, though not caring much as yet for the new love? Sybil did not know, but she felt miserable. As she reached her door, that of Blanche Cains opened, and that young lady herself appeared on the threshold, dressed, and with a book in her hand.

"Why, Mousey, where have you been?" she said, coming out towards Sybil. "I knocked at your door an hour ago for the second volume of this French story of yours, and the bird was asleep, as I thought—but no, it was flown!"

"Uncle was below, so I went to bid him good-bye," listlessly replied Sybil.

"You seem none the better for the ceremony," rejoined Miss Cains. "Come in."

She drew her into her own room, shut the door, and looking earnestly at Sybil, said very softly,

"Now what has Green-eyes done to make you look so miserable?"

"Blanche, he is going away because of the Count; and if I marry him he will not come to

the wedding, and I do think it hard to have but one uncle, and to be estranged from him."

"And what is it to him whom you marry?" asked Miss Cains, her lip curling with scorn.

"But it is, or it ought to be, something to him," jealously said Sybil. "Is he not my uncle? Only since he cannot find a word to say against him, why does he object, and put me by? He seemed so fond of me once. Even this evening he was quite kind."

The handsome Grecian lip of Blanche curled again.

"Yes, he seemed!" she said; "but his kindness ceases with your marriage. Shall I tell you why? He wants all your affection—he is envious of that share which can never belong to him. His is not a generous but a selfish liking."

"No, that is not it, Blanche," a little indignantly replied Sybil, "for if ever I want a friend—if ever I am in trouble—I am to apply to him; but I was very fond of him, and I believe he is a little jealous—indeed he said so."

"Oh! he did, did he? So Green-eyes can be jealous; but of course there must be liking for jealousy—that stands to reason."

"Blanche, you say nothing to comfort me."

"I can't," a little drearily said Miss Cains. "I never could understand your fondness for that uncle. It is not habit, for he is a stranger."

"But he is my father's brother," interrupted Sybil; "and so good and so kind, Blanche; he laughs at me a little, and he chides too, but I like it, for I know that at heart he likes me; and when he is indulgent and good-humoured, no one can be pleasanter than Uncle Edward."

"Then why don't you marry him?" sharply asked Miss Cains.

"Marry my uncle?"

"Ay, to be sure—I forgot the relationship; but do you know, Sybil, I fancy you like him a great deal better than that poor Count."

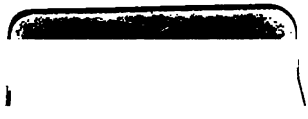
"Why, of course I do!" cried Sybil. "Of course I like my uncle better than the Count, whom I have only seen once, and not spoken to for more than five minutes. You do not suppose, Blanche, that I like him at all?"

Miss Cains laughed.

"No, my dear," she said; "but you will marry him, and care very little for Green-eyes after that; and Green-eyes, knowing it, is not pleased. We

are all a little selfish, you know, and I am selfishly keeping you up, though eleven is striking, so good night."

Thus dismissed, Sybil left, but her grief returned as she entered her own room. "Blanche means well," she thought, "but she does not comfort me at all!" She went to bed feeling disconsolate, and she cried herself to sleep, and when she awoke, she knew her uncle was gone. Ah! if she had known how and when their next meeting would be!

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

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